TWO BOYS IN A GYROCAR

NEGOTIATING A DIFFICULT TRAIL

TWO BOYS IN A GYROCAR

THE STORY OF A NEW YORK TO PARIS MOTOR RACE

KENNETH KENNETH-BROWN

ILLUSTRATED BY WALLACE GOLDSMITH

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1911

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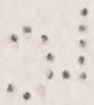
Published October 1911



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TO

FERRIS GREENSLET

THE ONLY TRUE BOY MOTORIST

WHOSE ADVENTURES

IN MOTORDOM

THRILL AND INSPIRE

HIS MOTORLESS FRIENDS

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From Drawings by Wallace Goldsmith

TWO BOYS IN A GYROCAR

CHAPTER I

A CURIOUS MACHINE

THEY were two unusual young fellows, and they sat in the waning light of the long summer afternoon, brooding over an odd machine, in an odd sort of workshop. A handsome collie was curled up in a corner, one ear cocked watchfully, even in his sleep.

Once the workshop had been Squire Kilbreth's old woodshed. Now it looked more like a blockhouse on the frontier, and seemed strangely out of place in the sleepy little town of Punchard, Connecticut. Heavy oak shutters, studded with nails and bolts, hung inside the windows. The glass itself was covered with whitewash, admitting the light but permitting no one to look through. And the single door, with its huge, hand-wrought hinges, was so massive that nothing less than a battering-ram could have forced an entrance.

In addition to these old-fashioned signs of fortification, there was wiring around the windows and the door, which an expert would have surmised to be connected with a burglar alarm.

As for the machine, which all these precautions

were evidently designed to protect, a casual observer would have taken it for a small touring-car; but on a closer inspection one would have been startled, and afterwards amused, at the difference between it and the ordinary motor-car. And ten men out of ten would have pronounced it a freak machine that never could work outside the brain of its inventor.

The two young men themselves were as interesting as either the machine they were contemplating, or the place they were in. The elder and taller of the two, Raleigh Kilbreth, had a high forehead and straight, fair hair. His gray eyes, set far apart, were often dreamy or contemplative, as if his mind were on other objects than his immediate surroundings, — though they could lighten up wonderfully when "the instant need of things" aroused him to action.

He had the head and the eyes and the long, supple hands of the born inventor, from the best of old New England stock.

The younger one was dark, and stockier of build. Intense practicalness showed in his earnest eyes, his rough, capable hands, and his quiet movements. His general appearance was that of one of the working-classes, as indeed he was, — Billy Hawpe, son of the most skillful blacksmith in Punchard.

Until it became too dark to see, they worked around the car, tightening a bolt here, filing away a bit there, testing and trying every part to make sure all was in perfect order. When it became too

dark for this, they remained brooding over the car, their minds still occupied with that which their eyes could no longer inspect.

At last, Billy, with a great sigh of happiness, said softly: —

"It's all ready!"

Raleigh did not speak. His eyes were looking off into the distance, a half-smile hovering on his lips.

"Turn on the light," he said. "I've something to show you."

Billy turned a switch, flooding the shop with electric light, and Raleigh pulled a newspaper from his pocket, folded to bring a certain column into notice.

He pointed to it with a long forefinger.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

The other read it carefully.

"Another automobile race from New York to Paris! That's interesting, but what has it to do with us?" He glanced up at his friend. "You don't mean —?"

"By the Great Horn Spoon, I *do* mean it!" Raleigh shouted.

Billy Hawpe looked at him a full half-minute to make out whether he were joking or not.

"You aren't sure yet that the car will work at all," he said at length, soberly.

"It's *got* to work!" Raleigh cried passionately. "The small model did — perfectly. It can't *help* running."

Still Billy stared with doubt at his friend.

"Have you thought anything about the expense?"

"Oh! hang the expense!" Raleigh replied impatiently. "I'll interest some capitalist — take him into partnership — name the car after him."

"Do you suppose you could?" Billy asked doubtfully. He had tremendous faith in Raleigh, yet this seemed almost too big an undertaking. "Do you suppose old Mr. Partridge — "

"Pooh! Old Partridge would n't put twenty cents into a scheme like this; and we shall have to have twenty thousand dollars, I dare say, to make the trip."

"Whew!" whistled Billy, whose breath was sometimes taken away by his chum's daring ideas.

"I'm going to — "

"Your father?" Billy interrupted hopefully.

Raleigh shook his head. "He could n't afford to risk such a sum of money — and he would n't do it anyway. I'm going to New York and brace Mortimer Z. Kidder."

"Mortimer Z. Kidder!" Billy gasped. "Why don't you go on to the President of the United States at once and have done with it?"

"The President of the United States has n't the money Mr. Kidder has," Raleigh answered. Then suddenly he changed the subject: "As soon as it gets a little darker we 'll take her out and try her."

This was more tangible for Billy. It was some-

thing he knew about; and for the next half-hour the two busied themselves in going over again with the utmost care this beloved machine of theirs. It was the combined result of Raleigh Kilbreth's inventiveness and of Billy Hawpe's marvelous skill with tools, and since this last stupendous suggestion of Raleigh's, it seemed more than ever important to leave absolutely nothing undone which might conduce to success.

There were wonderfully high hopes dependent on it, as shall be told in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE BOY WHO WOULDN'T GO TO HARVARD

INDEED a good deal did depend on this curious machine, so unlike all other motor-cars — a good deal for both these boys.

A year and a half before this, Raleigh Kilbreth graduated from high school, and passed his entrance examinations for Harvard. On the morning after he returned home from taking the latter, his father said to him with a beaming smile: —

"Raleigh, your mother and I both think you ought to go to the seashore this summer and have a real good time. I did not like the way you stayed here in Punchard all last summer, pottering around in your shop with that Hawpe boy. We want you to be fresh and rested in the fall for your studies at Harvard."

The clear-eyed, well-grown boy of seventeen became slightly paler, though there would not seem to be anything in his father's words to disturb him. Instinctively he turned to his mother.

"Yes," she said, smiling. "You have studied faithfully in school, — though we both feel you might have taken higher rank in your class if you had not

wasted so much time playing in your workshop, — and we want you to have a first-rate time this summer."

The kind words made it very hard for Raleigh to say what was in his mind. He hesitated; then finally blurted out:—

"Father, I don't want to go to Harvard."

Squire Kilbreth looked at his son over his spectacles with surprise.

"That is curious!" he said. "I did not know you preferred some other college to Harvard."

"It is n't that," Raleigh hastened to explain. "I don't want to go to college at all."

"*What!*" exclaimed father and mother together.

Like many other persons, especially in New England, they valued a college education for a young man above all else, the more perhaps that they had not had it themselves.

"I went through high school because I knew you wanted me to — and because I felt that I needed the mathematics," Raleigh said honestly.

"Yes, you did very well in your mathematics," Mrs. Kilbreth assented. "I only wish you had stood as high in other things."

"But now," the boy went on, "I want to stop learning out of books, and *do* things."

There was an ominous pause.

"What branch of business life do you contemplate essaying?" Squire Kilbreth inquired sarcasti-

cally; for Raleigh had never impressed him as especially businesslike.

An embarrassed look overspread the face of the boy.

"Why, sir, I—I do not wish to—to—go into any business," he stammered.

"Really? Perhaps you would like to spend your time in your laboratory, rivaling the inventions of Edison?"

Raleigh flushed at the cutting tone of his father, yet he stood to his guns.

"Yes, sir, I should," he answered.

Mrs. Kilbreth's anxious eyes had noted the friction arising between father and son, and gently she laid her hand on her son's arm.

"Perhaps your father and I had better talk this over alone," she said.

"Very well, mother; only there is one thing I must say first. For my experiments I need some money. Oh, yes; you have been awfully good about my allowance, but I should need more than that. I thought if father would let me use Aunt Jane's legacy—"

"We will talk it over, Raleigh," she interrupted, as she saw an angry light come into her husband's eyes at this last suggestion of her son. "You had better say no more for the present."

CHAPTER III

A MIDNIGHT CONSULTATION

Mr. and Mrs. Kilbreth talked together half that night. At times the Squire hot-headedly would insist that Raleigh must do as his parents thought best for him. Again he would declare that if the boy would not take advantage of the educational opportunities offered him, he should go into a store and work his ten or twelve hours a day, as he himself had done in his youth.

But the mother, in her quiet, insistent way, brought him to see that something was to be said on the boy's side — that, at least, he ought to be given a chance to show what there was in him.

Both the Squire and Mrs. Kilbreth saw cherished dreams of their son's future disappearing in this decision. The mother had secretly hoped to see her son some day leading the world to better things from a Congregationalist pulpit; while Squire Kilbreth — a man of no little influence in Punchard — had hoped that his son would become a brilliant lawyer — a power in politics — in the state legislature — in the governor's chair — who could tell? — perhaps still higher. But unselfishly the mother's

heart and the father's were willing to give up their aspirations for their son, if this would make for his happiness.

The legacy to which Raleigh had referred was one on which they had counted to put him through college. It had been left him by his aunt "to start Raleigh in life," and could be used in any way which seemed best.

The summer's early morning was nearly breaking when the good couple finally went to sleep, Mrs. Kilbreth having persuaded her husband to a compromise which seemed fair to all concerned.

Raleigh himself had tossed to and fro on his bed in a restless sleep, in which he was always dreaming of inventing things which became alive, and tormented him.

One time it was a submarine boat, which floated in at the window, with a horrible grin on its face, tucked him under its flipper, dived down into the ocean, and handed him over to an octopus with the remark: —

"Here's the boy who invents machines. Now, just show him your invention of a hydraulic press."

Thereupon the octopus had twined its squashy tentacles about him, and squeezed — and squeezed — and squeezed — Raleigh awoke to find his left arm asleep and tingling, where he thought the octopus had taken hold of him.

When next he went to sleep an aeroplane swooped

down upon him, and grasping him with its claws—he was surprised to find it did not have wheels or skids, as he had supposed, but horrid, sharp claws—swooped out of the window again.

Up and up it flew, till the earth looked like a large moon. Then suddenly it dropped him.

"Good-bye," it said. "Now invent something to stop yourself from falling."

The last words came faintly, for already he had dropped a mile or two. Down and down he fell, with a sickening sensation in the pit of his stomach. And up rushed the earth to meet him. A mountain-peak was just beneath him, and he came down on it so hard that he mashed it flat. Just as he was wondering if he were dead, he woke up to find that he had actually fallen out of bed. It was a tremendous relief to find it was nothing worse than that.

"I hope father won't come down on me to-morrow morning as hard as I came down on that mountain," he thought, as he scrambled back into bed.

His next dream was more reassuring. In it his father appeared before him, dressed in a sky-blue uniform, with gold epaulets, bearing a platter on which was an array of little machines.

"My son," he said, with a low bow, "I must confess to you that in secret I have always been an inventor, too. Here on this tray are all the inventions which have not yet been invented. You may take your choice of them."

Thereupon all the little machines began bowing and scraping, begging Raleigh to choose them.

Raleigh tried to make up his mind which was the best, but whenever he fixed his eyes on any particular one, that one would begin to ring like an alarm-clock, and whirl around so fast that he could hardly see it.

"That is curious," thought Raleigh. "I shall have to invent some way of keeping them still."

Just then they all began ringing and whirling together, and they made such a din that he woke up — to find that really the rising-bell was ringing, and it was time to get up.

CHAPTER IV

CONDITIONS

In spite of the reassuring dream of his father in a sky-blue uniform offering him inventions on a platter, Raleigh had never in his life been quite so nervous as the next morning when his father cleared his throat with a portentous "Ahem!" and prepared to acquaint him with the result of the parents' consultation.

"Your mother and I" — the good man never pretended that his wife's counsels had not great weight with him — "have decided to give this wish of yours a trial, — a fair trial."

He peered at his son over his spectacles.

"Thank you, sir," murmured Raleigh, and waited to hear what conditions would be attached to this trial.

"For the space of two years," Squire Kilbreth continued solemnly, "you may follow out your own bent. I do not make the condition that you are to work faithfully, because I know that you will not idle. But if at the end of that time there is no prospect of your accomplishing worthy results, then you are to give it up and go to college, — you will still

be young enough for that. And at college you are to work with diligence, not wasting any more time on experiments while there. Are you willing to abide by these conditions?"

Raleigh's eyes were sparkling at the vista which opened before him; for he had already spent many hours on the plans for the machine we found him and Billy working over.

"Yes, father, I agree. And — and — I thank you — very much," he stammered.

Both the father and the mother were glad they had acceded to their son's wish when they saw how happy it made him, and the Squire continued, with a less stern mien: —

"As to the matter of money, while I hardly believe your aunt could have had any idea of her legacy being spent in such a manner, — though perhaps she did, — perhaps she did — " he broke off, wagging his head doubtfully. "My sister Jane always did have queer fancies, and I sometimes think you are like her in a good many ways. However, what I was going to say was this: you may take half this legacy for your work and experiments. Then, if nothing comes of them, you will have to go through college on the remainder, and that will mean pretty close sailing — perhaps even partly working your way — where otherwise you would have been as well provided for as any boy need be. I want you to think of all this before coming to a decision."

"I can tell you my decision now," Raleigh replied quickly. "I have thought about it too much not to know, and—and—I hope you will never be sorry you gave me this chance."

CHAPTER V

HIRING A CHUM

To some persons it might have seemed the height of rashness to turn a boy loose in a workshop, with the command of a considerable sum of money; but the Kilbreths had faith in their son, and furthermore it was understood that Raleigh should keep a strict account of every penny he spent. Squire Kilbreth knew that this was one of the very best ways for a boy to learn the value of money, and whether he was spending it wisely or not.

The first use Raleigh put his money to was a strange one. He went out to try to hire a chum.

The friendship between Squire Kilbreth's son and the son of old man Hawpe had been a mild scandal in the staid town for some time, and several worthy ladies clicked their knitting-needles fiercely together whenever they fell to discussing it.

"If *they* were Mrs. Kilbreth they certainly would wish a son of theirs to associate with some one else than the child of a drunken blacksmith. But *there!* what was the use of trying to make folks be sensible if they were n't a-goin' to?"

And in their indignation the worthy ladies would

like as not drop a stitch, while the strong friendship between Raleigh and Billy continued as serenely as if they quite approved it.

Old man Hawpe was the best blacksmith in Punchard. He might easily have been more than this. His dexterity with his hands was marvelous. Some summer people, who had cottages on the hills to the west of the town, had "discovered" him, and got him to make andirons, lamps, brackets, and similar things at very remunerative prices.

Hawpe had also been discovered long before by the proprietor of the machine shop in Punchard, who would have been only too glad to employ him regularly. But Hawpe was in the habit of going off on sprees, at irregular intervals, and refused to take regular employment with any one.

Billy's mother had died when he was twelve years old — some said with a broken heart at her husband's habits. The memory of his mother never left Billy, nor of the sorrowfully earnest words she used to speak to him in the last year of her life. Young as he was, she managed to instill in him two fierce resolves: to avoid the temptation toward drink which might be latent in his blood; and to make something of himself in the world.

Unfortunately he found in his father no helper toward either of these resolves. Billy was permitted to go to school until he was fourteen; then, from mere perversity, Hawpe took him out. The boy re-

belled bitterly at this deprivation; but after many sleepless nights of futile planning, he made up his mind to accept the kind of education he *could* have; and for the next two years he learned all about mechanics and practical work that his father could teach him.

In time the ambitious boy became a more skillful mechanic than his father. When this began to dawn on Hawpe, instead of being pleased, he felt a cross-grained jealousy of his son's aptitude.

It was in this mood Raleigh found him, bleary-eyed and grumbling to himself.

The young inventor at once came to the point.

"Mr. Hawpe, I want to hire Billy to work for me."

With his glazed eyes the blacksmith stared at the boy.

"I said Bill'd got to work — an' Bill's *got* to work," he mumbled on.

"Well, I'll pay you three dollars a week for his services," Raleigh said in a businesslike way.

"Impident young rascal," Hawpe continued thickly. "It's high time he *was* at work — hanging 'round my shop — under my feet all the time — more bother than he's wuth."

"Will you hire him to me?"

For the first time Hawpe answered Raleigh directly.

"I'd's soon hire him out to you's to anybody else," he mumbled. Then a dull flame of rage came

into his bloodshot eyes. "Yes, you may have him and welcome — impident young scoundrel — thinks he knows more 'n his father — an' I taught him everything he knows."

"Very well, then, just sign this contract." Raleigh whipped out a paper from his pocket. "It's for two years. You won't be bothered with him during that time, anyway," he added diplomatically.

"Is thasho?" Hawpe asked, cheering up. "Gimme the paper."

He studied it with stupid gravity, then signed it, convinced that at last he had got the better of his objectionable son.

Raleigh had known enough about old man Hawpe to appreciate that a formal contract was the only thing to keep him from going back on his word whenever his mood should change. With the paper safe in his pocket, he blithely returned to his own workshop, where Billy, trembling with impatience, was awaiting the result of his friend's mission.

CHAPTER VI

WHY THE WOODSHED BECAME A FORTRESS

THAT contract was signed almost a year and a half ago, and every minute since then had been filled with interest for the two boys. There had been disappointments and failures; moments of a kind of excitement which do not usually fall to the lot of peaceful inventors; and through it all a steady march toward success.

For a time the woodshed preserved its usual appearance. The first change came when Raleigh decided to install electric lights in it in order that they could work as well on dark days and in the evening as when the sun shone.

Then one morning — it was three months after they began work — they came to the shop and found it wrecked. The electric wires were cut and torn from their fastenings; the tools had been taken from their racks, and were either gone or lay scattered about the floor; and worst of all, their model — fruit of three months' constant thought and labor — lay overturned and demolished before them. Had a veritable battle raged through the shop, it could not have presented a more desolate appearance. Neither

of the boys could say a word for fear of bursting into tears. It was a bitter moment for them; but it is from such moments that one learns to safeguard the future.

Billy finally began to pick up what scattered tools were left, and to bring some order out of the chaos of destruction.

Raleigh sat quietly on a box, a far-away look in his eyes, utterly oblivious of the present. For a half-hour he sat without stirring. At length he came back to the present.

"This shall never happen again," he announced, and his teeth shut with a click. "Sam Peavy's at the bottom of this, but I don't suppose we can prove it — or that it would do any good if we could. But Sam will never get in here again. Never mind the car," for Billy was mournfully trying to reassemble the pieces of their invention. "What we've got to do now is to fortify this place."

The next few weeks were spent in carrying out Raleigh's plans. Only when they felt that the mischievous idle boys of the town — who resented the fact that Raleigh and Billy would rather work than join them in their pranks — could not repeat their work of destruction, did the two young inventors again turn to their ruined model and start to work on it anew.

For the next year following, however, they had to be constantly on their guard. They never knew

when, or in what form, an attempt against them would take place.

It must be said, for most of the other boys in town, that they were not entirely prompted by malice. It became with them a sort of game, more exciting than playing smugglers or Indians, or even than trying to rob old Mr. Partridge's orchard. When Raleigh and Billy met any of the boys whom they suspected of these attacks, the latter grinned at them in quite a friendly manner — all except Sam, to whom was due the instigation and perseverance in this destructive mischief.

Sam Peavy was one of those mean-spirited boys who take pride in nourishing a spite. He was a big, hulking fellow, and was naturally a bully among the other boys. Raleigh, himself nearly as tall as Sam, had never come into collision with him, until one day when he found him cruelly beating a small boy, while two or three other small boys stood by in misery, not daring to interfere.

"Hold on, there!" Raleigh cried. "What are you licking that kid for?"

"None o' your darn business," Sam snarled back, "and you keep your mug out of this, or you'll be treated the same way." He turned back with pleased anticipation to the chastisement of the small boy.

Raleigh grew pale; for Sam was renowned as a fighter; but his eyes blazed at the merciless way Sam struck the small boy.

"Stop that!" he yelled, "or take some one of your own size."

There was faint applause from the other small boys, and without a word Sam turned and struck Raleigh with all his might in the face. Raleigh went down like a ninepin, but sprang up again like a rubber ball, and half-crying with pain and rage went for the bully. For fifteen long minutes they fought, the smaller boys dancing around in an ecstasy of hope and fear lest their champion fail.

When Raleigh could hardly stand any longer, Sam suddenly called "'Nough!" and admitted himself vanquished.

One closed eye, and a very bloody nose, was a small price to pay for the glow of satisfaction which surged through Raleigh's bruised body at this magic word. He held out his hand to Sam, but the latter pretended not to see it, and limped away, muttering.

Billy Hawpe was the small boy whom Raleigh had rescued, and this was the beginning of their friendship. Raleigh himself bore not the slightest ill-will toward Sam; but the latter never forgot his thrashing, nor the promise he made himself to "get even" with Raleigh.

The opportunity for this had never come before. In school Raleigh only laughed at Sam's churlishness, and Sam carefully avoided any direct contest with him.

When their shop was wrecked, neither Raleigh

nor Billy had the slightest doubt as to who was responsible for the mischief, though they had no proofs whatever. Since they had no intention of making any complaints — not even to Squire Kilbreth — this did not matter. That they were not taking needless precautions, however, they had abundant proof during the months that followed.

Many a night — awakened by the burglar alarm — Raleigh would rush out, armed with a stout hickory club, and find signs of an attempt to break into the shed. On other nights, when a vague sense of disaster would not let them rest quietly in bed, both boys would take a couple of blankets and sleep in the shop.

They learned to become as unceasingly watchful and resourceful as frontiersmen in a hostile Indian country. They became so inured to hardship that they could rest perfectly on the bare floor. They learned, too, to sleep lightly and to awaken at the slightest noise, — to awaken, not to sleepy half-consciousness, but to instant, wide-awake alertness.

In all this Sam Peavy was unconsciously rendering them a service which they were to appreciate to the full before many months were past.

Their final precaution was the purchase of a young collie. When Squire Kilbreth came upon the item, in Raleigh's accounts, of "One collie pup — $5," he raised his eyebrows.

"Do you call that a legitimate manufacturing expense?" he inquired.

"Yes, I think so, father," Raleigh replied, and told of the repeated attempts made to wreck the workshop.

Squire Kilbreth made no further comment, and as for the collie, Merk (short for Mercury), in a short time he seemed to understand just what was expected of him. He would roam around the yard at all hours of the night, soft-footed and silent, unless he discovered an intruder, when he would make a furious commotion. After his advent the boys could sleep in their beds without fear.

The first thing Raleigh taught Merk was never to accept anything to eat, except from his master. And the chunks of poisoned meat which from time to time were found about the place were thus rendered harmless to destroy this vigilant ally of the young inventors.

Even Squire Kilbreth had to acknowledge the collie an invaluable member of the combination, some nine months after his arrival, when his furious barking awakened the whole Kilbreth family, to find an armful of oil-soaked waste brightly burning against the door of the workshop. A few minutes later and nothing could have saved the building and the precious machine inside.

This proved to be the last attack made on their machine while it was in Punchard. Sam Peavy, evidently frightened at what he had done, ran away from town, and with his departure all molestation ceased.

This was shortly before the time when our story opens,—to which we will now return,—and as Raleigh waved his newspaper, telling of the second New York to Paris automobile race, Merk looked up intelligently at him, and seemed to give his thorough approval of the plan of taking part in it.

CHAPTER VII

BESIEGING A MAGNATE IN HIS LAIR

A MONTH later, Raleigh Kilbreth was on his way to New York. His coat pocket bulged with drawings and photographs. His heart beat tumultuously, now with hope, and again with fear of failure.

What had appeared a reasonable plan in Punchard lost every vestige of plausibility as he neared the metropolis. There were such vast numbers of persons in New York, and they were all so intent on their own business: what chance was there that a great man could be induced to give attention and money to the insignificant affairs of a boy?

Raleigh had spoken so confidently of interesting a financier in their invention that he had dazzled Billy; but Billy would have been surprised could he have known how tremulously his chum's heart was quaking, now that the actual interview was approaching.

The city itself stupefied Raleigh. He had been in New York before, of course; but it had been as a sight-seer, with money to pay the big city for amusing him. Going to her a suppliant, to obtain money, not to spend it, she turned a different mien to him.

But though his heart quaked, Raleigh stoutly wended his way down to that part of the city where the buildings tower the highest, where men rush around the fastest, and where the money-kings have their lairs.

Mortimer Z. Kidder!

Raleigh had only to mention the name, and any errand boy could tell him where the great man's office was. "Forty-two-and-a-half Wall Street" was as well known in financial New York as the White House is in Washington.

But finding the office of a magnate, and obtaining an interview with him, Raleigh discovered to be two quite different propositions. A surly clerk in the outer office of Mr. Kidder's handsome suite eyed him suspiciously when he asked to see Mr. Kidder.

Raleigh had never been looked over in quite this way before, and it made a hot wave of resentment flash over him.

"What 's your name?" demanded the clerk, as if a prisoner were being arraigned before him.

"Raleigh Kilbreth."

"What 's your business?"

"That I can only tell Mr. Kidder," Raleigh answered firmly.

"Well, you can't see him. He 's busy."

"I 'll wait till he is at leisure," Raleigh answered.

The surly clerk gave him one more glance — as

pleasant as if he had caught him trying to pick his pocket — and then paid no further attention to him.

Raleigh waited an hour, — two hours. Other men came in: a few were admitted to the inner offices; the rest, rebuffed, went away.

Luncheon-time came, and a substitute of equally forbidding disposition took the place of the clerk.

"Do you think Mr. Kidder can see me now?" Raleigh asked the newcomer.

"Mr. Kidder 's gone out to luncheon — can't tell when he 'll be back — no use your trying to see him anyway."

The words were spitfired at him.

Raleigh only laughed. The difficulties of the game were rousing his pugnacity.

"I 'll go out and get luncheon, too — can't tell when I 'll be back — but you can bet your bottom dollar I 'll keep coming back till I see Mr. Kidder," he announced cheerfully, in the jerky manner of the clerk.

The elevator took him swiftly down, and he emerged into the street, wondering where, in this labyrinth of tall buildings, he should find something to eat. The white sign of a "Quick Lunch Restaurant" caught his eye.

He entered in company with a number of other men and boys. Most of them moved along with the self-confidence of habitual patrons. Each seized a big nickle-plated platter from a pile, and walked

down the counter, selecting the things he wanted. No waiter paid any attention to them, except to hand out to them mugs of coffee or cocoa or milk. As each man filled up his platter, he scurried to any place that happened to be vacant at the numberless small tables in the large room.

Raleigh followed their example. He chose a ham sandwich, an egg, a piece of pumpkin pie, and asked for a cup of coffee.

At the end of the counter a girl stood with a bunch of tickets in her hand. She gave a glance at Raleigh's platter, punched one of her tickets, and tossed it down beside his egg.

"Pay at the desk," she said laconically.

He took his seat at a small table, and hurriedly began munching his sandwich. There was no reason why he should hurry, except the contagious example of every one else. When the last crumb of his pie was eaten, Raleigh noticed that he had taken barely nine minutes for the meal.

"Well, I suppose I might as well go back and wait in the outer office," he thought. "They 'll see that I mean business, at any rate."

The elevator shot him up to the eighteenth floor, as if he had been a mail package in a pneumatic tube, and once more he confronted the surly clerk who had kept him at bay all the morning.

"Can I see Mr. Kidder yet?" he asked politely.

Without a word the clerk glowered at him.

"See here, why do you look at me so suspiciously?" Raleigh asked.

"I'm paid to be suspicious," the clerk retorted bluntly. The ghost of a smile flickered on his lips, then disappeared as if afraid of being seen there.

"If you think I'm dangerous, search me, and make sure I have n't a cake of dynamite in my jeans. Come on!" Raleigh held out his arms horizontally, grinning at the clerk.

The man arose from his seat and solemnly took him at his word. Raleigh had never picked a pocket, but he almost felt as if he had been caught in the act, as the clerk methodically searched him, not only emptying every pocket, but pawing him all over, like a baker kneading bread.

The sheaf of drawings he passed over with a sour smile. Drawings were no novelty to him, nor did he consider them dangerous. When he finished, Raleigh drew a long breath.

"You certainly made a good job of that. I feel as if I'd been turned inside out — and shaken. You don't think I could do any harm to Mr. Kidder now, do you?"

The clerk laid a suggestive hand on Raleigh's arm.

"Pretty good biceps," he growled.

Raleigh's face fell in comical dismay.

"That's a fact! But you don't think I'd hit an old gentleman, do you?"

There were few people who did not like Raleigh Kilbreth, with his frank honest manner, and even the Kidder clerk thawed a trifle before him.

"No, I don't *think* so, but I may be mistaken. I hold my job here as long as I make no mistakes — and I've got a wife and three children."

The unexpectedly human ending to the sentence made the boy look at this unprepossessing employee in a different light, and he felt quite sorry for him, doomed to regard all his fellow men with the eyes of suspicion.

His thoughts were interrupted by the tinkle of a bell. The clerk disappeared into the inner office. Five minutes later he reappeared in the doorway and beckoned to Raleigh.

"Mr. Kidder will see you now," he said, and almost looked pleasant.

CHAPTER VIII

HIGH HOPES

RALEIGH stood before the financier, an elderly, fat man, with a slow, shrewd glance.

"Well, young man, what is it you want to see me about?" he rumbled.

There was so much Raleigh wanted to say that he did not know where to begin.

"Why — I have invented a — an automobile, and I —"

"Want me to go into partnership with you, I suppose."

"Exactly!" Raleigh assented, with an engaging grin.

"Young man, there are an average of nine hundred cranks a day who would like me to go into partnership with them," boomed the financier.

This was not encouraging, but Raleigh collected his wits, and persisted: —

"Mr. Kidder, will you give me just a few minutes to prove to you that I'm not a crank? Then you can accept my proposition or not, as you like."

The financier nodded.

"You know, of course, about the second automobile race from New York to Paris next month?"

Another nod.

Raleigh hesitated an instant, then plunged on: —

"Mr. Kidder, I have invented a car which I believe can win that race."

The venerable financier smiled indulgently. He had met so many men, young and old, who thought they had solved things. But there was something he liked about the yellow-haired youth with the gray eyes. And toward the close of the day he could afford himself a little relaxation.

"Tell me about it."

"You know what enormous difficulties the regular, four-wheeled cars had to overcome in the first race, on account of the poor going," Raleigh began.

"You have invented an aeroplane attachment to carry you over the rough places, I suppose?" Mr. Kidder asked, with ponderous humor.

"Not quite, — but look at these drawings."

The magnate glanced over them, carelessly at first, then with more attention.

"What's this," he muttered, "a two-wheeled, single-track automobile? H'm! Think you've got something wonderful here, don't you? But it's nothing more than a huge motor-cycle. And every time you slow up, it'll flop over on its side."

"No, sir, it won't," said Raleigh.

"Won't, eh? Hop out and prop it up, will you?"

Raleigh's eyes were dancing. "It will stand in

perfect equilibrium, without any outside support, so long as the motor runs," he said eagerly.

"Overcome gravity?" Mr. Kidder asked sarcastically.

"In a way. You see there's a gyroscope under that hood, revolving in a vacuum, at the rate of —"

"Ha!" the financier cried. "Like Brennan's mono-rail car!"

"Exactly. What he has done for the railroad car, I have done for the automobile."

There was a full minute's pause, while the financier pored over the drawings.

"Does it work?" he asked at last.

"That's why I'm here. My car can go anywhere a bicycle can — practically anywhere a team of dogs can drag a sledge."

In his excitement Raleigh gave the table a thump with his fist, such as it rarely received from any one less than a multi-millionaire.

"It means," he continued eagerly, "a car that cannot turn turtle. If my car is going along the side of a bank it may slip to the bottom, but it can't upset. If it runs over a precipice it may be smashed into smithereens, but it will be smashed with its wheels under it. — See here!"

He took from his pocket a common gyroscope top — which the clerk in searching him had not considered dangerous — and set it going. Then he hung it

horizontally from the edge of an ivory ruler, which he picked up from Mr. Kidder's desk.

"By all the laws of gravitation that top ought to fall; but it will hang on there so long as it spins."

The magnate's eyes began to glisten. He would not have been the man he was, had he lacked imagination.

"Yes, I know something about that," he said.

Raleigh's hopes seemed certain of fulfillment. He spread out more of the drawings in front of the millionaire.

"If my machine had been intended solely for this race, it would n't have been different. Most machines have to be hung low, for safety at speed, or on sidling roads. But mine has three-foot wheels, and a two-foot clearance of the roadway, and yet, as I said, it *can't* tip over. It 's air-cooled — that 's a twenty per cent saving of weight. It has friction drive and may be geared down indefinitely, so that no conceivably bad roads could prevent the wheels from turning, so long as the motor worked."

For a full five minutes the financier studied the drawings carefully. Then he laid them down with an air of finality.

"My boy," he said kindly, "if I did not have on my hands at present one of the biggest financial undertakings which America ever saw, I would look into this. As it is, I wish you success, but I cannot associate myself with you in it."

He touched a bell, and an attendant came in on the instant.

"Good-afternoon."

The end came so suddenly that Raleigh found himself again in the outer office and on his way to the street before he could realize that his hopes, which had mounted so high in the last few minutes, were dashed to earth.

Slowly he walked up Broadway, oblivious of his surroundings: of the tall buildings, the shops, the bulletin boards in front of the newspaper offices, of the crowds of people homeward bound.

At the bridge terminus he automatically got into a Madison Avenue car. Automatically he gave up his seat to a lady, — nor noticed that he was the only one to do so, — and eighteen minutes later, after the conductor three times had shouted, "Grand Central Station," he automatically got off. Still in a brown study he walked to one of the ticket offices and pushed a bill toward the clerk behind the grating.

"Where to?" asked the ticket-seller.

"What?" Raleigh asked vaguely.

"Think I'm a mind reader?" the ticket-seller snapped. "Where do you want a ticket for?"

Only half-rousing himself from his abstraction, Raleigh answered: —

"Paris."

The ticket-seller pushed back the bill.

"'T ain't enough!" he said sarcastically.

"Oh!" Raleigh woke up at last. "I 'm afraid it is n't." He shook his head sadly. "Well, then, give me one to Punchard, Connecticut."

The ticket-seller stamped the pasteboard swiftly and tossed it out. Then he took time from his official duties for a scornful smile at Raleigh's retreating figure.

"Nutty!" he ejaculated.

CHAPTER IX

A NEW BIRD ON BILLY

RALEIGH'S gloomy eyes looked through the car window on the darkening landscape. Presently he would be back in Punchard and have to tell Billy that he had failed. And the bitterest part of the disappointment was that it seemed such a useless failure. Mortimer Z. Kidder might just as easily have assented as refused. Raleigh knew that for an instant it had been touch and go which way the financier would decide.

"I'd have named the old car after him," he muttered wrathfully.

His thoughts continued circling round and round the subject. Once he sat up in his seat and struck the open palm of his left hand so violent a blow with his right fist that it stung.

"By Jove! I don't see now why he didn't do it!"

Unconsciously he had spoken aloud, and a drummer across the aisle grinned at him sympathetically.

"Threw you down, did he?" he remarked.

Raleigh laughed and settled back in his seat, and

during the remainder of the journey, whatever his thoughts he kept them to himself.

Billy met him at the station, eager for news.

Raleigh shook his head. "It's no go."

The two young men left the station in silent depression. The street lamps of Punchard shone dimly in the gloaming.

"By George! I'd like to start in that race," Raleigh presently murmured to himself.

"So would I," Billy echoed solemnly.

They walked on in silence for a quarter of an hour. At length Raleigh looked up, a half-smile on his lips. "Billy," he asked, "did you ever hear of a Phœnix?"

"Sure thing. There was a trotting horse here at the County Fair named Phœnix; and there is the Phœnix Fire Insurance Company —"

"No, I mean the Phœnix bird."

Billy wrinkled his forehead.

"Phœnix bird? I thought I knew all the birds around here. Is the Phœnix, maybe, a new breed of hens, like those Indian games old Mr. Partridge —"

"No, the Phœnix was a mythical bird of the olden times, and when he grew old he used to burn himself up, and then from the ashes there came a brand-new Phœnix, just as lively as ever."

Billy looked doubtfully at his chum. This Phœnix bird and his habits did not appeal to his common sense.

"Seems as if more likely there 'd have come out roast Phœnix," he observed.

"There did n't, though. And my schemes all seem to be like Phœnixes. No sooner is one of them destroyed than another springs up from its ashes."

"Oh! is that all?" Billy exclaimed, considerably relieved. "What plan have you now?"

Raleigh did not reply at once, though his eyes shone from the thoughts he was thinking. Suddenly he blurted out —

"Billy, I had my mouth all made up for that race. Suppose — suppose we go in it, anyway."

The other stared at Raleigh.

"But you said it would cost thousands of dollars."

"So it will — thousands and thousands," Raleigh assented cheerfully. "But — Billy, do you know what one of the most valuable things in business is?"

"What?"

"Publicity! — becoming known! — advertising! And here 's our chance for free advertising. It will cost us mighty little to start in the race, and if we only go as far as Buffalo — as Albany, even — the whole world will hear about us and our machine."

"That 's so," Billy assented solemnly.

"And if the whole world hears about us," Raleigh went on, a jubilant ring to his voice, "some manufacturer may offer to see us through for a half-inter-

est in our patents. Or," and his eyes twinkled, "some romantic maiden lady with untold millions may so admire your black eyes that she will put the said untold millions at our disposal. Then we shall win the race, and all you 'll have to do will be to marry the lady with the untold age — I mean millions."

"Oh! come off the perch!" Billy exclaimed, blushing.

When his chum had a certain dancing light in his eyes, he never could quite make out how much he meant and how much he was fooling.

"But if we 're going to do this," Raleigh said more seriously, "we 've got to hustle the next month. I 've thought of two or three little things that we shall need to help us, and we 've got to get to work on them at once."

CHAPTER X

THE RACE AND THE MEN AND THE CARS

In Siberia there are quaking, bottomless morasses, called savannas, covered with a thin crust of dried dirt. On this crust lightly weighted travelers may pass in safety, though in fear; but heavy wagons or automobiles break through frequently, and, unless speedily rescued with men and boards and ropes, sink gradually out of sight and are lost forever.

Both in the Peking to Paris race, won by Prince Borghese in 1907, and in the first circumglobular contest from New York to Paris, won by the Thomas car in 1909, these savannas were the greatest terrors to the contestants. The mistake of the latter race was the late date, in midwinter, on which it started. For while this forced the cars and their drivers to endure the full rigor of an American winter, in the journey across our continent, it was not early enough to enable them to pass over the dreaded savannas when these were yet frozen hard.

This time the start was to be on Thanksgiving Day. Thus San Francisco might be reached — if the weather proved favorable — before the worst of the winter set in; and the savannas could be crossed before they were thawed out by the spring.

The contestants were to assemble in the officially designated garage on Tuesday, November 27, two days before the start.

There were thirteen entries, and twice as many drivers or mechanicians.

All but two of these were already famous wherever the automobile was known.

There was Wildejagd, a jolly, fat German, whom by his looks one would expect to see driving a dray rather than a devil-wagon, but one who had won more big automobile contests than any man living — or dead. He did not in the least mind answering to the American perversion of his name, "Willie Jag."

There was Bull, the Englishman. Whatever his first name had been originally, he had long since learned to answer to "John." Twice he had been first in the great Land's End to John o' Groat's race. Bellerton, his team mate, had once held all the bicycle records from twenty-five to a hundred miles, and was willing to risk his neck at any time to gain equal fame motoring. The Frenchman, Tizaine, debonair and enthusiastic, had set France on fire by defeating all the Germans, even Wildejagd, in the last Vienna to Berlin race. He had lately been devoting himself to the aeroplane, but condescended to return to earth again for this great contest.

Hotstough, the American, had just spent a month among the Rockies, to accustom himself to the vicis-

situdes he expected to encounter. He was a Vanderbilt Cup winner.

Renshaw, the Canadian (who was to pilot a German car), had once been sergeant in the Canadian Royal Mounted Police, and was one of the hot favorites. What he did n't know about the wilds of North America was n't worth knowing.

But it is useless to go through the list. Every one of twenty-four experienced motor-men was a favorite with some portion of the public. Each of them had won races, had had hairbreadth escapes, had proved his courage and resourcefulness in many a hard-fought contest.

Only the other two, who made up the twenty-six, were unknown, — two striplings just growing into manhood, who were going into this race with a little, low-powered, two-cylinder car of their own invention. Neither they nor their machine had thus far roused the slightest interest in the public. Their names had been published at the foot of the list of entries, with the ridiculous horse-power of their machine; but it was assumed that they were a couple of nobodies who had seized this opportunity to see their names in print. As for their car, what could such a midget hope to accomplish against the pick of the world? For the world had sent on its best and strongest.

England was represented by the *Asquith Flyer*, the *Reliable Thames*, and the *Gowfer's Goer*.

Germany pinned her faith to the big *Liebig*, with the *Bismarck* a close second.

Italy, besides the wonderful *Abruzzi*, had the *Ischia* and *Capri*.

The French cars were the *Briquette* and the *Bonicastel*.

While, as might have been expected from their success on the track, during the year before, America was represented by the *Yankee Doodle* and the *Dixie*.

In addition to all these, there was the *Leopold Amphibian*, an ingenious Belgian machine, which, without any alteration, could pass from land to water, where its speed was twelve miles an hour.

During the winter this accomplishment would be of little value; but later, when the thaws began to set in, the *Leopold* hoped to gain many miles on its competitors through its ability to cross streams irrespective of the condition of the bridges. Indeed a report at one time gained credence that emissaries of the Leopold Company were to be sent ahead to blow up bridges, but there was no truth to this.

Most of the cars were between sixty and seventy horse-power, the *Amphibian* alone being as low as forty-five; while the *Capri* was eighty, the *Gowfer's Goer* a hundred, and the huge *Liebig* a hundred and twenty horse-power.

And it was among these leviathans that the little gyrocar was daring to thrust its puny self, with its two young drivers — and their dog.

CHAPTER XI

THE GYROCAR'S PUBLIC APPEARANCE

VERY early in the morning of this Tuesday, November 27, Raleigh and Billy were out of bed and making ready for the run to New York. Everything they could think of had already been done the night before, so they were able to be off while yet Punchard stretched in its bed and yawningly prepared to get up.

Mr. and Mrs. Kilbreth were nearly as excited as their son. None of the four could eat much breakfast, but Mrs. Kilbreth put them up luncheon enough to feed them halfway to the North Pole, so there was no danger of their arriving in New York hungry.

With her last lingering good-bye kiss Mrs. Kilbreth thrust an envelope into her son's hand; and then father and mother stood waving to the adventurers as they drove away, brave in two imposing pairs of goggles, but otherwise far from accoutred like the fur-capped, fur-gloved, fur-booted, and fur-mantled opponents they were soon to meet.

As they sped out of sight, Mr. Kilbreth turned to his wife.

"I declare, mother, I don't know as it was wise to

let those two boys go on this wild-goose chase," he said, with a doubtful shake of his head. "Raleigh will spend all the rest of his Aunt Jane's legacy, and then if some manufacturer does n't take up his machine — "

But the mother's faith was serenely proof against any doubts, and she brusquely interrupted those of her husband.

"Squire, that was the best idea Raleigh ever had. It can't help interesting some manufacturer in him."

"It 's a good deal of money to spend," he grumbled on. "I believe it would have been better — "

"Well, there is no use thinking about that now. They are gone, and you are not speedy enough to catch up with them."

Meanwhile, as if to escape just some such danger, the gyrocar was rolling swiftly onward, its drivers in high spirits. They fastened their overcoats up under their chins, and wound their voluminous mufflers round and round their necks, to keep out the nipping air.

They nodded gayly to the early milkman on his rounds. The man was too much astounded to speak. It was the first time the gyrocar had been out in the light of day. All its trials had been made at night, and on lonely, unlighted roads, where its own headlight had blinded the chance wayfarer rather than aided him to scrutinize it.

That the two were working on some invention of

Raleigh's, all Punchard knew; and all Punchard concluded that if it had amounted to anything, Punchard would long ago have heard what it was.

Now the milkman simply stared at them, his eyes popping from his head, and his mouth ajar. Just as they were passing out of sight he recovered himself sufficiently to ejaculate: —

"Gosh, what a car!"

Indeed, the gyrocar was a sight to make a man look twice. Its two wheels being, naturally, under the centre of the car, were largely hidden by the body; and the absence of the usual four wheels at the corners made it appear to be gliding over the ground without visible means of support.

When one realized that it was not a new-fangled kind of aeroplane, but an automobile, it seemed too tall and top-heavy. Only on noting the graceful way it leaned inward on rounding a corner did one lose the feeling of its instability.

A mile out of Punchard, to get away from a frightened horse, Raleigh drove up on a bank. He brought the car to a stand, and the uncanny way it remained upright, on the sloping ground, in perfectly stable equilibrium, caused the driver almost to forget his capering steed.

Thoroughly enjoying the interest they roused in the few people they met, the young men rolled smoothly over the none too good roads leading away from their native town. The two large wheels took

up much of the vibration, overriding inequalities as smaller wheels could not have done, and they were helped by excellent oil-tempered springs and five-inch tires.

The body of the car was a plain, box-like affair, with wooden seats, in place of the luxurious upholstering of the usual touring-car. They had not spent much time on that; but the backs were cleverly sloped to make them comfortable, and Mrs. Kilbreth had made two fat cushions for them to sit on.

"It was a great idea of your mother's to make us these cushions," Billy observed. "We'd be kind of cold without them."

This brought to Raleigh's mind the envelope his mother had given him on parting. He drew it from his pocket.

"I wonder what is in here," he said.

It crinkled suggestively as he opened it. There was a half sheet of note-paper, with these words written on it —

From mother — to help you a little farther —

and then ten crisp twenty-dollar bills.

Raleigh gulped, and the tears came into his eyes.

"Is n't she a — a brick!" Billy said; but Raleigh could not say a word.

The trip to New York passed off so quickly and uneventfully that it was only a little after nine o'clock when they reached the official garage in

Times Square. A man swung open the door for them. The car drove inside and came to a stop, standing on its two wheels, as steady as a rock, the gyroscope softly humming in its vacuum hood.

The first person to pay any attention to it was the Austrian, Czizz, whose name sounded like drawing soda-water, but who drove like a hurricane.

"Du lieber Himmel!" he ejaculated feebly. "Was ist denn das?"

Several men, attracted by the Austrian's interest, crowded around the car.

An ominous growl from Merk, and he sprang to his feet, his hair rising fiercely on his neck.

"Quiet, boy! What's the matter?" Raleigh commanded.

"Hullo, fellers!" sounded the familiar voice of Sam Peavy; adding impudently, "Guess Merk ain't forgotten old times."

"Hullo, Sam; what are you doing here?" Raleigh answered, without resentment.

"Oh, I've got a job here in the garage. I'm doing fine. Wouldn't go back and rot in Punchard if you'd give me the whole place. I'm a New Yorker now."

"Well, Punchard can stand it, if New York can," Billy observed dryly.

Further reminiscences were interrupted by the flood of questions which broke from the other men in the group. And the car had hardly been put in

its assigned place before a dozen reporters were clustered around the two newcomers, and firing a broadside of questions at them.

It was amusing to note the behavior of the different newspaper men. Some were enthusiastic, some skeptical, and one, whose breath indicated that he was no teetotaler, openly ridiculed the gyrocar. Its fittings especially called for comment from him. He pointed to a long piece of wood, shaped like a ski, only wider.

"I say, there 're carrying along an extra mud-guard," he cried facetiously. "Mighty good idea! There 'll sure be lots of mud to guard against."

"That is n't a mud-guard," Raleigh protested, with great earnestness; "that 's a conversation fender."

"Conversation fender?" the reporter repeated, mystified. "What 's that?"

Quite innocently Raleigh explained: —

"Oh, we just put it up when the fool remarks get too thick around the car."

Amid the roar of laughter which this elicited, the facetious reporter went over to jot down what Sam Peavy had to say.

For Sam was basking warmly in reflected glory, and held a little court of his own, far enough away for the hostile growls of Merk not to cast doubt on his pretensions. He had known Raleigh and Billy all his life; had been to school with them; was pretty nearly their most intimate friend — according

to himself. About the actual details of their car he preserved a mysterious air of secrecy — for the best of reasons; but before the day was at an end he had all but invented the car himself.

Photographers followed hard on the reporters, and our heroes were snap-shotted a dozen times, — an attention which made them feel very foolish, — and all the afternoon papers had illustrated, front-page articles about them and their car. (Sam managed to creep into the headlines of the facetious reporter's article.)

Raleigh would have chuckled to see his scheme for obtaining free advertising work so well, had something not happened before the papers appeared which put a very different aspect on this whole expedition, up to now as much a lark as anything else.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN IN THE FUR OVERCOAT

EVER since the drivers for the great contest had begun to assemble in New York, a tall, bearded man in a marvelously fine fur-lined coat had been loitering around the official garage.

He was accepted as an automobile crank, and humored as such. His evident wealth, too, may have had its share in the kind treatment he received; for professional automobilists are human — and have cars to sell.

He spoke now to this driver, now to that, and always in the language of the man he was addressing. It made no difference whether they were English, Italian, French, or German, he addressed each with equal fluency.

While he was interested in the machines, he paid more attention to the drivers themselves; and somehow he always seemed disappointed in the latter. It was as if he were seeking something in these hardy adventurers which he did not find.

He was in the group which gathered around the gyrocar upon its arrival. He had studied it in silence, and then had scanned the face of its driver; and an

eager light had come into his own as his glance rested on Raleigh Kilbreth's. Indeed, so earnest and steadfast was his gaze that Raleigh was discomposed by it. While all the others were crowding around, talking and asking questions, he said no word. He only loitered near the gyrocar, watched the young men put it in its appointed place, in a far corner of the garage, and apparently was so deeply interested in this curious car that he could not tear himself away from it even after all the other spectators had gone away.

"I wonder if he can be a manufacturer," thought Raleigh, his usual irrepressible hopes springing up in his breast.

It happened that he and the stranger stood alone near the car. The latter glanced around to make certain they were out of earshot of any one else, and then said in a low voice:—

"Would it be possible for you to meet me later to-day, if I should send for you?"

Although his attitude was still that of the casual spectator, he spoke in tense, earnest tones.

"Why, yes. I can see you here now,—or at the hotel."

The stranger shook his head.

"No, that cannot be. I must see you privately. And will you please say nothing of my speaking to you, to any person?"

"Except to Billy Hawpe," Raleigh replied.

"Who is he? — Ah! your friend. Very well, only — I must not be seen talking with you." He broke off abruptly, and walked out of the garage.

Raleigh stared after him in amazement, wondering whether the tall man were quite possessed of all his wits. The next minute the incident was swept from his mind by an avalanche of questions fired at him by a hot and belated reporter, who feared lest he might lose some detail about the gyrocar which his confrères had obtained.

Nor did Raleigh think of the man in the fur coat again until, he and Billy having gone to their room in the hotel to wash up for luncheon, there came a knock at the door, and, on opening it a small, dark man stood on the threshold, hat in hand.

He bowed politely.

"You haf tell my master you would do him the honor of meeting him," he said, with a strong foreign accent. "He ask, can you take dinner with him at two o'clock. Address is here."

He held out a blank envelope, and as Raleigh took it, gave another bow and walked swiftly down the hall.

"But, I say — "

The man was gone, nor had Raleigh known just what he wanted to ask him if he had stayed. He stood, irresolute, the envelope in his hand.

"What 's up?" Billy asked.

"Why, I suppose it 's from a chap who spoke to

me in the garage — that tall man in the fur-lined coat. He asked me if I could meet him somewhere — said that he could n't be seen talking to me — "

"Better look out!" Billy interrupted. "You never can tell about these foreigners. He may be a Black Hand chap."

Billy's ideas concerning foreigners were that they were quite a different species of humanity from Americans, and to be regarded with due suspicion.

"I may as well see what's in this envelope, anyway."

Raleigh tore it open and found, in typewriting, an address on Eleventh Street, and the instructions: —

Ring the bell and give your name.
If your friend is entirely in your confidence, I should be very glad to have you bring him, too.

There was no signature.

"In your confidence — well, I like that!" snorted Billy. "And I guess you *don't* go around there without me. They might kidnap you and hold you for ransom, or — "

"Sell me into slavery in the Barbary States," Raleigh interrupted, laughing. "Billy, you 've got a powerful imagination, once you get out of Punchard."

Nevertheless it was all delightfully mysterious,

and after some further discussion they decided to accept the invitation; and with lively anticipations they went down at the appointed time to the address on Eleventh Street.

CHAPTER XIII

AN ASTOUNDING PROPOSITION

THEY found the designated number on Eleventh Street to be an ordinary, old-fashioned house, like all the rest in the block. To Billy's suspicious eyes, however, there was something sinister about its commonplace exterior, and even Raleigh, it must be confessed, mounted its steps and rang the bell with some trepidation.

The door was opened by a man in a waiter's apron.

"I was told to give my name. It's — it's Raleigh Kilbreth — "

"Oh, yes," assented the waiter cheerfully. "If you will just step upstairs, Mr. Kilbreth."

He led the way. They were reassured to see that the basement and first floor were used as a quite innocent public restaurant. The waiter opened the door of a private dining-room, and announced: —

"Mr. Kilbreth!"

The tall stranger of the garage arose and shook hands with his two guests.

"I cannot tell you how glad I am that you accepted my very informal invitation," he said eagerly. "I feared — But, never mind. Doubtless you are hungry,

as all young fellows ought to be at this time of day. Waiter, bring the luncheon at once."

In spite of the cordial greeting of the stranger, Billy was somewhat awed during the meal that followed. He did not even know the names of many of the dishes of which he partook, though he had no fault to find with their quality, and soon forgot to wonder if they were drugged.

The stranger attended to their hunger, but as their appetites abated, he drew them into conversation, until, toward the end of the luncheon, both found themselves talking with him as if he were an old friend. There was a singular charm of high-breeding about his manner which quite captivated them, while, without their knowing it, he was studying them with the most minute attention.

After the table was cleared of all but fruit and some candy, which completed the captivation of Billy, a still more eager light shone in the stranger's eyes.

"And now," he asked, "will you permit me to broach the subject on which I wish to speak to you?"

His guests were instantly as much on the *qui vive* as he.

"I was one of those," he went on, "who had the privilege of seeing you arrive in your wonderful motor-car this morning. May I ask if you feel convinced that you can make the difficult journey in it? Believe me, I do not ask this from idle curiosity."

Had the facetious reporter that morning asked the

same question, Raleigh would have parried it with some quip, or with ridicule; but he could not answer their host thus.

"I think the car *could* make the trip," he replied slowly.

The other was quick to notice the young man's hesitation.

"If it is not an impertinence, may I ask if there is any doubt about your going the whole way?"

Raleigh laughed ruefully, but replied frankly:—

"Why, you see, sir, we are starting in this race in order to bring our car to the attention of the manufacturers, but we have not money enough to get to Paris. We shall go as far as our money holds out—and then come back."

"Ah!" the tall man exclaimed, and the information seemed rather to please him than otherwise. "Then, perhaps you may be willing to listen to a proposition I have to make to you."

He paused, his eyes searching Raleigh's face; then said slowly:—

"If you will take—with absolute secrecy—a parcel from me to a certain person in Siberia, I will pay all your expenses from here to Paris."

CHAPTER XIV

"YOU BET WE CAN!"

To say that the two young inventors were astonished by the stranger's offer gives but a faint idea of the state of mind into which it threw them. Their wildest conjectures had contained no such possibility as this. If he had clapped a pistol to their heads and demanded their money or their lives, they—or at least Billy—would not have been greatly surprised. But to make it possible for them to take part in the whole of the race, in return for so small a service.

To Raleigh it seemed as if the breed of fairy godfathers were not yet extinct. His vivid imagination already saw the gyrocar crossing America, making its way through Siberia, tearing over Europe—and triumphantly entering Paris before all the others.

The more cautious Billy, after one blinding flash of enthusiasm, began to have his doubts. Inexperienced as he was, he knew that men did not go about the world bestowing such favors on casual acquaintances.

"That seems a very little thing to do in return for such a large one," he remarked.

Raleigh's face clouded over at Billy's words. He wanted tremendously to take part in the race, but he might pay too high a price for it. What could be in the package which demanded so much secrecy? Bombs naturally suggested themselves at once.

Like most Americans he sympathized with those who were trying to change the present despotic Russian Government, yet, when it actually came to taking part in a nihilistic movement, which might include assassination, it was a different matter.

"I don't think we should care to carry any bombs," he said.

His voice showed the regret of a man whose high hopes are dashed to earth.

The tall man smiled sadly.

"I am not asking you to take part in an errand of destruction, but in an errand of mercy."

"Then, why do you demand this secrecy? Why are you willing to pay such an enormous price for delivering a parcel in Siberia, when an express company would take it for comparatively little?" Billy demanded.

"No express company goes where I want to send my package."

The stranger rose from his seat, and paced slowly up and down the room. He was deep in thought, yet from time to time glanced at Raleigh and Billy, as if it were of them he were thinking. At length,

with a gesture of decision, he stopped and began speaking, rapidly — eagerly.

"On the other side of the world from here is a desolate little Siberian village. There it is bleak winter for eight months of the year. In summer the ground only thaws out three or four feet down, and hordes of mosquitoes make the days and nights a torment. Utter squalor reigns. There are no books, no comforts of any kind. The native peasants are brutish as animals. There is nothing there that makes life worth having."

He paused. "To such villages the Russian Government condemns those whom it fears, to a death-in-life, until they shall be laid to rest in the frozen earth. O God! how slowly the time passes in one of those villages!"

He raised his clenched fist, laboring under great emotion. In a few seconds he recovered his composure and went on.

"My only daughter has been in exile there for two years, — two long years, — with hope ever deferred, hope ever dying. It is to her I wish to send money and a disguise, in order that escape may not be so impossible."

"Oh!" both his listeners exclaimed, deeply moved by the glimpse of desolation these words gave them.

"I did not know, sir —" Raleigh stammered. "Of course, anything we can do —"

As if he did not hear him, the Russian went on:

"Even then her labor will be only begun. The Trans-Siberian Railway is so closely watched that she will have to make her way across the wide continent on foot, or in springless *telegas*, through a country bristling with officials, where any minute may see her recapture and her removal to an even more remote and desolate village in sub-arctic Siberia. Ah! think! If you had a sister, and she had to walk alone from San Francisco to New York through such a country! You may consider me heartless to be living here in luxury, while she is there in captivity." He gave a short laugh. "I was not always here. I, too, was in Siberia — nine hundred miles away from my daughter. This separation was part of the punishment the Government meted out to me. Seven times I have tried to effect her escape. Seven times I have failed. Twice I nearly lost my life. Now I am powerless to act; for I am watched continually by spies, even here, in America. That is why I dared not be seen speaking with you — why I asked you to meet me here."

Rapidly Raleigh had been thinking, while the Russian talked. When the latter paused, he turned to his chum: —

"Billy, we can do more than carry a package to Siberia; we can take her with us out of it, can't we?"

Billy's grave young face was terribly in earnest.

"You bet we can!" he answered.

CHAPTER XV

A BANISHED PRINCE

Into the Russian's eyes came a great eager light. He stretched his arms out to his guests.

"You will do that for me?" he cried hoarsely. "I was not mistaken in you! But this is more than I had hoped for. My thanks — I cannot express them."

"Oh, that 's all right," Raleigh replied awkwardly.

Then they fell to planning.

"The very boldness of the attempt may be its safety," the man said. "Even Russian officials would hardly suspect a contestant in a public race of harboring a political prisoner. One thing, though: as you value your very lives, you must not be connected with me in any way."

For a time he sat deep in thought, his brows knit, conflicting emotions showing on his face. At length he said, as if to himself: —

"Is it right to accept this from you? I am a father — but I must not forget that you have fathers and mothers, too. If you should fail — If you should be discovered — what would be your fate?"

Raleigh's jaw set resolutely, as he said: —

"I don't think my father — or my mother either — would think much of me if I held back just because of myself."

Billy gave an approving grunt.

The Russian's gratitude shone from his countenance.

"Yes, I was right about you," he repeated. "This race came as a God-sent opportunity. I have spent days studying the different drivers. Bravery — resourcefulness — they all possessed. I looked for more — for that quality which makes men willing to run great risks for the sake of an ideal. Tizaine, the Frenchman, had it in a measure, though his character was too volatile. He would do grandly for a few days; but I know what tenacity Siberia demands in one who would conquer her.

"I should have had to trust him, however, had you two not come. You" — with a graceful inclination of his head he indicated Billy — "are less of an idealist, yet you never give up a resolve once you have formed it. You" — he addressed Raleigh — "are a dreamer, a poet."

"I never wrote a line of poetry in my life," exclaimed Raleigh from his honest soul.

"Was it not you who conceived your car?"

"Yes."

"And you," turning to Billy, "whose clever hands executed this conception?"

"Yes, sir, I worked on it," Billy answered in a matter-of-fact way.

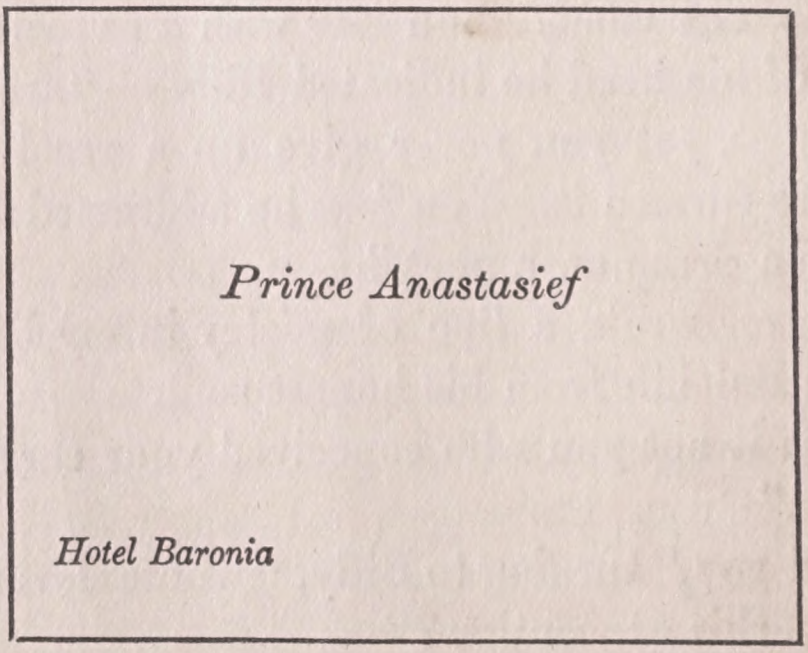
"It is as I thought. I am a judge of men. It matters not that a poet dreams in machinery. What is this wonderful car but a poem on wheels?"

There was a pause, not without embarrassment for the Americans. They did not know how to reply to such language.

The Russian continued:—

"Since we have thus strangely become associated, it is but fair that you should know more about me and of the causes which led to my banishment, and to that of my daughter. This can be no affair of business between us: we must be friends."

From his breast-pocket he drew a golden case, opened it, and handed a card to each of his guests. It bore the name



"I happen to have been born among the rich and fortunate," he went on; "but with a desire to make the lot of those dependent on me somewhat better. You are young yet, and you live in a country where there is a chance for every man — if he is man enough to take it. It is not so in Russia. There the souls of the poor are starved and trampled upon so that the rich may feast the better."

The Russian stared afar off, again seeing in his mind's eye the poor peasants and their misery in his own country.

"I knew that my efforts could not accomplish much; but all of us patriots feel that the little done to-day will become the father of more in the future. It is a monster force against which we work — we know that. But," he shrugged his shoulders, "we do what we can. Russia may appear beyond redemption, and the efforts of those who lose both their fortunes and their lives may seem futile: it is not so, however. As there is a God above, it cannot be so.

"The Government does not wish the peasants to lose their ignorance and superstition. Where would absolutism be if the people were enlightened? Those who try to uplift them are looked upon as enemies of this Government. I knew that beforehand, and I also knew what the consequences might be, were I to be discovered. I did not underestimate the value of money, as do so many of us, and transferred all

the great wealth my father had left me into foreign banks, and beyond the power of an unscrupulous bureaucracy. The land alone I could not move: that had to remain in my unhappy country.

"For years I was able to carry on my work successfully. Then I came against the monster force which has crushed so many others. I was arrested and banished to Siberia. My wife and daughter were separated from me and sent to different places there. My wife died on the way. . . .

"You may wonder that I was willing to expose my wife to such a danger, but she and I were united in this desire to help our peasants; and in spite of what we knew, we could not really believe that the Government would consider our efforts criminal."

The Prince made a manifest effort to banish from his mind the thought of the woman he had loved, and whom he was to see no more. He forced himself to think only of present needs.

"I will not weary you with more details," he said. "The afternoon is passing, and there is much for me to do."

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE HOTEL LOBBY

"I NOTICED your equipment in the garage," the Prince went on. "You have done much for your car, little for yourselves — and Siberia is no lenient adversary. You would freeze to death dressed as you were this morning. You will need fur coat, fur caps, fur mittens, and boots. — Do you shoot?" he broke off suddenly.

"Raleigh is the best shot in Punchard," Billy put in, "and I'm not so bad."

"That's excellent! Your lives may depend on your skill, if it be a hard winter. There are many wolves there. You must have the best — what do you call them? — 'shooting-irons.'"

"But —" began Raleigh.

The Prince held up a hand.

"If your 'but' refers to expenses, you are to spare none. Nothing that money can provide shall be lacking. That's my part of the expedition. I cannot go with you, — I cannot share your perils, — but at least I can see that you have all that is necessary. We must not meet again — it would be too dangerous. My agents will look after you. To begin with, call

to-morrow afternoon at Shipman & Sons, on Broadway, and ask for Mr. Digweed. He will have his instructions to outfit you properly. — And now, good-bye! The blessings and hopes of a father will follow you step by step."

He kissed the young men on both cheeks, in Russian fashion, to their great embarrassment.

When Raleigh and Billy again found themselves on the street it was late in the afternoon. The time had flown wonderfully fast while they had passed beyond the every-day world of machinery and the United States into a mediæval realm of romance and Russia. Of a sudden they had plunged into things they had read of, but had hardly believed to exist outside of books.

Raleigh threw back his shoulders and drew in a long breath of the clean November air.

"Makes a fellow glad he is born in free America, does n't it?" he exclaimed.

They took a turn around Washington Square, and then started up Fifth Avenue. At Fourteenth Street, Billy said, in an awed tone: —

"Say, Raleigh, we 're actually going through the race."

"We 're going to do a heap more than that. We 're going to rescue a girl from a despicable tyranny which does n't hesitate to condemn some of the noblest of its citizens to lifelong misery and an early grave.

I— I—" He shook his fist in the air, and broke into an apologetic laugh. "I know I 'm talking like a Fourth of July orator — but I feel that way."

"So do I," said Billy soberly; "I feel like two of them."

After supper that night they were sitting in the lobby, talking over the events of the day, and watching the people who continually passed before them.

Raleigh's long legs were sprawled out in front of him. A short, thick-set man with a blond mustache stumbled over them. He turned in the most apologetic way.

"I beg of you to pardon me," he said, with a German accent. "It vas most stupid of me. I hope I did not injure your feet."

"Not at all," Raleigh reassured him. "I ought n't to have been taking up so much room."

"It vas not your fault. Only my nearness of eyesight haf I to give as an excuse. Good-even — But are you not" — he glanced down at a newspaper in his hand — "are you not der celebrated young man who haf invented der car mit only two veels?"

He pointed to a picture in the newspaper he was carrying.

Both young men leaned eagerly forward to see the paper. It contained a two-column notice of them and their car, with photographs of all three. The picture of Raleigh was such a poor likeness that one would not have thought a stranger could recognize

him from it; but this did not occur to them at the time.

Here was fame coming upon them, indeed. They had been so much taken up with Prince Anastasief that they had forgotten all about the newspapers.

The first time a person sees his name — and especially his picture — in the papers, is a moment of sweetness not often duplicated.

"You haf not seen the other papers — no?" their new acquaintance asked, beaming with friendliness. "I haf them all here."

He pulled up a chair, and produced a sheaf of newspapers from his pocket.

"I declare, Billy, we 're getting the advertising we wanted," Raleigh remarked, delighted, as they looked over the papers.

"Adfertising? You are adfertising for some pig gompany, perhaps — yes?" the stranger asked.

"No. There is no big firm behind us. We made the car ourselves."

"Ach! it is *wunderbar!* Two yong vellers like you made that car! Dat is truly America for you. And then you go into this race just for the fun, as you say? In Shermany yong mans do not haf so much money to shpend. You are millionaires — yes?"

"No, we have n't — that is, it is n't we — er —" Raleigh stopped lamely.

"Perhaps you haf some rich friend — some old

gentleman, who vishes to encourage experimentation — yes?"

"Perhaps!" Billy acquiesced dryly.

The non-committal reply relieved Raleigh of his embarrassment. It recalled to his outspoken nature that, after all, this was no affair of the stranger's. To the latter, too, it may have indicated that his questioning was being carried to impertinent lengths; for he at once turned to other phases of the subject. What a general interest the great race had roused in all civilized countries, even in those represented by neither car nor driver.

While the German was talking on, Billy had been regarding him with a humorous uptwist of the corners of his mouth. In spite of his genial manner, the man had a singularly expressionless countenance. It was as if the muscles of his round, flat face had lost the power of reflecting the feeling within. His eyes, also, of a muddy, gray-green, had the look as if his real self were hidden from observation by smoked glasses.

Without appearing the least observant, he noted everything. He had marked Raleigh's embarrassment when asked who was financing their expedition. When Billy had put in his laconic "Perhaps!" his glance shifted to the latter for an instant, and the quizzical expression in Billy's eyes might almost seem to have disconcerted him in an infinitesimal degree. But he betrayed nothing by his manner.

Affably he continued to talk of the race and the interest it was exciting.

"Take Russia, for example," he remarked; "she does not manufacture cars, and she has no drivers competing. Yet efery day there is a Russian coming to the garage. It seems he cannot haf enough of the cars. Perhaps you haf noticed him there? He is a tall, handsome man, with a full beard."

"Yes, we noticed him," Raleigh replied.

"He could tell you much about trafeling in Russia—and Siberia." His beady eyes fixed themselves in sudden intentness on Raleigh's face. "But perhaps you haf already spoken mit him?" he ended suavely.

"We have hardly had time to make many friends here," Billy observed.

"Ach! it is a bitty. So much knowledge he could gif you."

He rose to his feet, and held out his hand.

"I may see you again. I haf much interest in dis magnificent contest. If one of our Djerman cars cannot be the vinner, I hope you vill be the fortunate ones."

They watched his short square figure till it passed through the revolving door of the hotel.

"He's a queer duck," Raleigh commented.

"I'll bet he's a Russian spy," Billy answered with conviction.

"Nonsense! Your contact with foreign princes

has gone to your head, old man. You will be seeing plots and counter-plots in everything we come across, till this wears off. That was just a stray Dutchman, who 's seen our pictures in the papers, and took an interest in us."

Unconvinced, Billy shook his head, but did not argue any further.

"Let 's take Merk out for a walk," he suggested.

They went down for the collie, who was languishing dolefully in the cellar of the hotel, and wondering what manner of adventure this was which began by putting him in prison, while his master went off gayly about his business.

When they returned from their walk, and were just getting into bed, Billy suddenly said : —

" Raleigh — if we see that German again, I 'd be mighty careful what I said to him."

The other boy laughed. " The Prince was right in his diagnosis of you, Billy. When you get an idea into your head it *stays* there. What 's the matter with that poor German ? "

" Oh, nothing — only he 's *too* smooth."

CHAPTER XVII

AN IMPROMPTU CHRISTENING

THE forenoon of the next day — the day before the start — was filled with a hurly-burly of men and motors. They, like all the other drivers, seemed unable to go over their car often enough, though they could find nothing whatever to alter or improve. They did not take out the car, but started up the motor, which set the gyroscope to humming again, and rendered the props at its side useless.

This morning the gyrocar was comparatively unnoticed, in its dark corner of the garage. The fickle public was temporarily more interested in the *Leopold Amphibian*, which had promised to give an exhibition of its powers on the Central Park pond; and in the huge *Liebig*, whose one hundred and twenty horse-power, it was prophesied, would force it through anything.

Each of the cars, besides its two drivers, was to carry an official correspondent and checker, who was to make certain that the automobile was not surreptitiously boosted on a freight car, during any part of its journey, and helped along in this primitive manner.

The correspondent assigned to our friends was a tall lean man, with long lank hair, named Blythe.

"Is that the car I'm to go in?" he exclaimed, when he caught sight of it. "Why, for heaven's sake, what's to keep it up! Yes, I've read about it, and I see that it balances now, but just wait till I try to get into it."

Very gingerly he placed one foot on the step, and gradually rested his weight on it.

"H'm! Does n't seem to turn over, does it; but that's probably because I don't weigh much more than the suit of clothes I'm in. Aha! I've got the idea!"

He hurried off, and came back with a crowbar.

"Now, just see me turn her upside down. We'll expose this thing in about three jerks of a lamb's tail."

An amused and interested group watched his efforts to pry over the car. He found he could push it sideways along the floor, but with the motor keeping the gyroscope running he was unable to disturb its equilibrium.

Finally Blythe became convinced that his efforts were futile.

"I never did know anything about machinery," he admitted, "though I know a little bit about most everything else."

In this last statement Blythe was certainly not exaggerating. He had been many different things

in his life. As a boy he had run away to sea, and then deserted his ship in time to take part in the Jameson Raid in South Africa. Working his way back to America before the mast, he had been smitten with the gold fever, and had spent two years in Alaska. He knew a few words in half a dozen languages, from Indian to Russian, and wielded so ready a pen that his services were always in demand among the newspapers.

But whatever his temporary calling might happen to be, he had a faculty for poking his nose into any adventure or danger in his vicinity. From these he somehow always managed to escape unscathed. Perhaps it was his sad and lugubrious air which made men loath to harm him.

The great mortification of his life was that editors were always calling on him to edit humorous columns in their papers. By preference he wrote sad, sweet poetry, — odes and things, — but he could never get any one to publish them. He had a firm belief that there was what he called a "literary trust" which controlled the magazines, and into which an outsider could not gain admission.

His melancholy manner never left him except when dangers became very thick about him — dangers which he was always prognosticating. Then in the pleasure of finding his croakings coming true, his own spirits would soar and he would become cheerful. In the darkest hours he quite deserved his name.

While Blythe was still trying to discover some weak point in the gyrocar, an official came bustling up to Raleigh in a great state of excitement, and pulled out a notebook.

"I say, young man, what is the name of your car? Forgot to ask you yesterday. Got to have its name, you know. Why did n't you mention it before? Ought to have sent it in with your entry. Quite irregular."

He spoke explosively, like a motor-car whose ignition is not working properly.

"Its name?" Raleigh repeated slowly. "Why, really — that is to say, we had n't —"

Billy nudged him. "What 's the matter with *Phœnix Bird?*" he suggested in an undertone.

"Ahem!" Raleigh coughed, then turned to the official.

"The *Phœnix Bird* is what we are going to call it."

"Well, she 's a bird all right," the official replied, as he jotted down the name.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CONVERSION OF RALEIGH

THE day had come to a close, and again Raleigh and Billy were resting in the comfortable armchairs of the hotel lobby. The afternoon had been spent with Mr. Digweed, who had turned out to be, not a salesman of Shipman & Son, but a gentleman awaiting them there. He appeared to know exactly what was required for such a journey as theirs. He had smothered them in furs that felt as hot as a furnace, and had bought various other articles which he deemed necessary.

When through with Shipman & Son, he had taken them in a carriage to a first-class gun-shop, and put two of the finest magazine rifles and automatic pistols — such as would make the mouth of any young fellow water — into their hands. Keenly he watched them handle them. The pistols were of a kind neither of them had seen before, but a few minutes sufficed to make them feel quite at home with them.

"I guess you two know how to manage firearms," Digweed remarked, satisfied.

In all the afternoon's expedition, the question of price interested their guide not at all. He only in-

sisted on the very best of everything. It was such shopping as the boys had never dreamed of — like stepping into fairyland and ordering whatever they wished. And now, in their armchairs, they were living over that wonderful shopping, when a familiar voice exclaimed: —

"Ah! goot-efening!"

There was no mistaking the accent. The German of the blond mustache stood before them, holding out an enthusiastic hand. He drew up a chair.

"I haf not been to der garage to-day, but I haf hoped you vould be here to-night. All retty for der race — yes?"

"All ready!" Raleigh replied cordially.

It was pleasant to see a face one knew even slightly in this cityful of strangers.

"And you are prepared to discover your vay arount de big vorld?" he asked affably. "Dat seems to me such a difficulty."

"We found our way up from Punchard to New York," Raleigh replied solemnly. "I guess a little place like Paris can't get away from us."

"Ach! The enthusiasm of youth," the German exclaimed. "But it vill be many tousand miles before you can ask: 'Vich road is to Paris?'"

He laughed heartily at his own humor, and then continued casually: —

"You asked off the tall Russian how better it is to go across Siberia?"

"No, we haven't seen him to-day."

The other seemed a trifle disappointed at the answer. After a slight pause he added with an air of mystery: —

"Something about him I vill tell you. He is a revolutionist — an escaped convict."

Raleigh sat upright in the greatest amazement.

"You don't mean that?" he cried.

"Indeed, yes!" The man lowered his voice. "He is an Anarchist! He vould upset the Government, bring apout ruin und civil war!"

"Gosh! — Say, Billy, what an awful man! He might have put tacks in our tires!"

Billy buried his face in his handkerchief, and blew a loud blast, to keep from laughing.

"Oh, no," the German hastened to reassure them. "He vould not put tacks in your tires. It is to the Russian Government he is malicious."

"Malicious, is he? H'm! A desperate character — the kind you read about in books."

The German was plainly pleased at the tone of the conversation. He bent forward and confidentially added: "He is a dangerous man. Ve haf been trying to get evidence against him for some time, and —"

"But if he is such a person, I should think it would be quite easy to get evidence against him," Billy remarked innocently.

"Ach! you do not comprehend," the German

answered eagerly. "It is a difference of laws here. But," he added significantly, "I can tell you that the Russian Government vould pay vell for anything showing actual criminal activity on his part."

"Then you have no proof of actual criminal activity on his part?" Raleigh asked.

The German was a trifle taken aback.

"No-n-o — dat is, I vould say, it is de difference of laws. He has made much trouble on his estates among the peasants."

"Is that so? How did he do it?"

"By putting vicked ideas into their heads."

"And so you'd pay well for something which would enable you to get hold of him and extradite him, so that you could punish him for putting wicked ideas into peasants' heads?"

"Dat is it exactly!"

Raleigh mused awhile on these words; then turned to his chum: —

"Billy, what do you say to quitting this race, and going sleuthing after this dangerous character? There's money in it. You might make quite a rep, — who can tell? 'Billy, the Bloodhound of Punchard!'"

The other could contain himself no longer, and burst into laughter.

The German stared, and at length realized that Raleigh was making fun of him. His little mud-colored eyes flashed as he jumped to his feet.

"You are treating mit contempt my vords. If ve vere in Europe you vould haf to answer to me, but here in this *verfluchte* country — bah!"

He snapped his fingers, and, whirling about on his heels, walked rapidly away.

"I guess you are converted to the spy theory, now," Billy observed. "But don't you think it is risky to get a chap like that down on you?"

"You would n't have me be polite to him, would you? It was all I could do to keep from telling him what I thought of him and his job."

Before Billy had time to say anything more, a page came through the lobby, calling loudly: —

"*Mr. Kilbreth! Mr. Kilbreth!*"

Raleigh sprang to his feet.

"Two large packages for you, sir, by special messenger. He won't leave them, sir, without your receipt for them."

CHAPTER XIX

BILLY ACTS

Billy Hawpe was by nature of a less enthusiastic temperament than his chum. Of the things which Raleigh saw in his mind's eye as finished products, Billy always saw the difficulties to be overcome. But even he could not restrain his exuberance when they opened the two huge packages, in their own room, and disclosed the treasures they contained — treasures which were now their very own.

"Say, Billy, when we get back to Punchard in these fur coats they'll think we discovered a gold-mine on our way, won't they?" Raleigh shouted.

Billy paid no heed to him. He was already lovingly fingering the firearms, whose well-oiled parts slipped over each other with the satisfactory smoothness of perfect fitting steel on steel.

At last he looked up solemnly at Raleigh.

"I feel like going out and shooting up the town," he said soberly.

But after the first ecstatic half-hour, he put down the firearms, with an air of determination.

"I'm going to take Merk out for a walk," he said.

Raleigh looked at their new possessions with regret.

"I hate to leave all these," he answered. "It does n't seem as if they would be here when we came back, if I did n't keep an eye on them."

"Well, you stay here," Billy assented eagerly. "I shan't be gone long."

"All right!"

Billy made his way down into the bowels of the hotel, where Merk welcomed him with frantic joy. The dog was so crazy at being freed, especially when he got outdoors again, that he would assuredly have run beneath the wheels of one of the many automobiles in the street had he not been unusually well-trained.

When Raleigh was present, he looked to him for orders; in his absence, he would obey Billy. To the voice of any one else he turned a deaf ear. Now Billy had to speak to him sharply before he would come to heel.

Of the first policeman they met Billy made an inquiry, and then proceeded uptown at a quick pace. He had not the air of one merely going out for a walk. There was purposefulness in his manner, and once or twice he repeated a street and a number to himself.

At Fifty-sixth Street, he turned to the right, and presently came to the place he was seeking.

It was a very quiet hotel of elegant unostentation,

such as few of the casual visitors to New York know of. The blacksmith's son was abashed at the thought of entering, especially with a dog at his heels. But summoning his courage he passed the flunkey at the door, who looked at him very sharply, and seemed half-inclined to stop him.

Billy walked sturdily up to the clerk at the office desk and asked:—

"Is Prince Anastasief in?"

Again he met a suspicious stare, and Merk rumbled a low growl, as if resenting such treatment.

"If you've got anything for him, I can have it sent up," the clerk said.

"No, I wish to see him."

"Have you a card?" the clerk asked.

Poor Billy blushed. He had never had a card in his life.

Somewhat relenting, the clerk shoved a blank card and pen toward him, and Billy wrote his name on it — never so awkwardly before.

To the manifest astonishment of the hotel clerk, the answer returned immediately from the Prince, asking Mr. Hawpe to come up to his rooms.

Blushing again, but this time with pride, Mr. Hawpe stepped into the elevator, Merk close beside him with ears cocked forward, very suspicious of the whole proceeding.

The Prince himself opened the door in answer to the bell-boy's knock. A look of anxiety was in his

dark eyes, but his instinct as host triumphed over his desire to learn what had brought Billy to him. He welcomed him in, detaining the bell-boy with a gesture.

"You will permit me to order you a little refreshment?" he asked.

"No, I thank you," Billy replied. "I only came to see you for a few minutes — on business."

The bell-boy disappeared, and Billy, after one glance around the apartment, — such a one as he had never seen before, — at once broached the subject that had brought him.

"Prince Anastasief, you said yesterday that you were shadowed by agents of the Russian Government even here in America, did n't you?"

"Yes, to a certain extent. Fortunately they can do me, personally, little harm. In preventing me from rendering aid to others, they have hitherto been more successful."

"Do you know any of them by sight?"

"The agents of the secret police? Yes, I believe I know them all. We revolutionists have lately turned the tables on them and begun to study them with as much care as they have long expended on us."

"Is there a stocky, flat-faced one, with a blond mustache?"

The Prince's eyes began to sparkle.

"Who speaks with a German accent?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. With mud-colored eyes—"

"And little expression in his face, and yet who can have very agreeable manners?"

"I guess that's the man."

"My friend, I did not think you had such powers of observation — and of deduction. That is Kotzalki, half German, half renegade Pole, and wholly dangerous. How did you come to know him?"

"He stumbled over Raleigh's feet, in the lobby of the hotel, and then got to talking with us."

"But what made you suspect him?"

"Well," — Billy could give no better reason than that he had given his chum, — "he was too smooth."

"'Smooth?'" the Prince repeated in a puzzled tone. "Ah! I understand. You mean too suave, too plausible. Wonderful that you should have seen through him so quickly! You would make a fine detective, with such natural *flair* as you possess."

Billy had no idea what *flair* meant, but he felt very much flattered. To hide his gratification, he hurried on.

"I want to know what he might try to do to us."

At the question, the Prince pursed up his lips reflectively.

"If he has any suspicion of what you are going to do for me, he will try to prevent your ever getting to Siberia. If, in spite of him, you succeed in reaching there, he will be like a hawk on your trail, watching you every instant, and hindering you at every step."

"Then we're stacking up against the other twelve cars and the secret police of Russia besides," Billy remarked thoughtfully.

"Very likely. But you did not tell him that you knew me, did you?"

"No, though I think he suspects it. I suppose he's pretty good at suspecting."

The Prince stroked his beard, ruminating; and when he spoke again, it was with profound solemnity.

"I will not conceal from you that what you have told me makes me fear that this undertaking is even more difficult than I had thought. Kotzalki has not bothered me for some months — I hoped they had found him more useful at home. But now — If you wish to withdraw from this undertaking, I do not feel that I should urge you to stay in it. Will you consult with your friend and let me know your decision by telephone? That is the safest means of communication."

"I don't need to consult Raleigh," Billy answered grimly. "I know what he'd say — if we consulted a week: we'll go ahead if we meet a Kotzalki at every cross-road."

CHAPTER XX

MERK ON GUARD

After Billy left the Prince's hotel, a vague premonition of evil settled down upon him. He did not regret the reply he had made the Prince, and he knew Raleigh would have given the same; yet now, plodding down Fifth Avenue, — twice its usual width, in its semi-desertion at night, — with the immense, oppressive city around him, the gravity of their undertaking weighed heavily upon him. He had made light of encountering a Kotzalki at every cross-road; but what would these boastful words avail against the forces confronting two inexperienced young fellows?

"However, I don't expect we shall be inexperienced long," he thought ruefully.

Merk, as if he understood all that had passed, kept close to Billy and regarded every passer-by with open suspicion.

"I believe I 'll just drop around and take a look at the car," Billy decided, hoping to allay the uneasiness which he could not dismiss from his mind.

Quickly he walked the half-mile to the garage,

nodded to the man at the door, who recognized him, and made his way to their car, standing in a dark corner of the huge room. It was kept upright by the folding legs at its side, the gyroscope having long ceased to revolve — though its own momentum had kept it going for nearly four hours after the motor stopped.

A thrill of pride shot through him, as he contemplated the car. What a wonderful fellow Raleigh was to conceive such a machine — overcoming one difficulty after another, as fast as they arose. Modest Billy did not give a thought to his own share, to his skill of hand and brain, which enabled Raleigh to outline to him an idea with entire confidence that it would be worked out in the right manner.

It was a rare friendship between the two, and contained no trace of jealousy.

"Raleigh never suspects any one — unless they 've done something to him," Billy mused on. "But I do, and if anything should happen to this car, I 'd never forgive myself."

Yet what could happen to it, safely housed in the official garage, with a watchman always on hand, and the start of the race next day.

Billy turned away, feeling that he had been foolishly over-anxious, and walked back toward the entrance.

There was a little office on one side, and from it came the murmur of voices. A familiar tone — then

an accent he had heard not many hours ago, struck his ears, and he stopped.

Merk, ears pricked forward, began to growl. Billy dropped to one knee, and put his arm around the collie's neck.

"Quiet, sir!" he commanded sternly.

Holding his own breath, and half-strangling Merk, Billy stood tensely, listening. He could not make out the words, yet there was no possibility of doubt about the speakers: Sam Peavy and the moon-faced Kotzalki were in low-toned consultation.

Stealthily Billy withdrew and tiptoed his way back to the car, his hand always on Merk's collar.

"Merk, jump in here!"

Obediently the collie sprang into the front seat.

"Now, lie down, sir, and watch it! *Guard it!*"

Merk wagged his tail. It was far from being the first time he had performed this duty, and, looking up at Billy with his intelligent brown eyes, he as much as said: "Now you can stop worrying. I'll look after this."

Billy again turned toward the office; but now, instead of walking quietly, he blundered along with considerable noise, and presently began to whistle in a cheerfully tuneless way.

Sam was at the door of the office awaiting him.

"Hullo, Billy," he said, with an exaggerated friendly manner; "that's a bully car you've got."

"Why, hullo, Sam! I was just taking a look at

it, to see it was all right for the night," Billy replied with equal friendliness.

"Aw! you need n't have bothered about that. There 's always a man here to see after everything."

"Is that so? Your trick to-night, I suppose."

"I know what you 're thinking of, Bill," Sam said, with some confusion. "But, honest! that was n't me. I never had a hand in trying to wreck your car. In fact, I always did like you two fellers, and I tried to make Ev Tompkins and Bummy and the rest of the fellers in my gang leave you alone."

"Is that so?" Billy answered innocently. "Then, Sam, I owe you an apology. I always thought you were the ringleader."

He held out his hand, and the big flabby paw of Sam lay limply in it for a second.

"Aw! that 's all right," Sam assured him awkwardly.

After a pause he asked with extreme carelessness: —

"Where 's Merk?"

"Oh, I 've put him to bed," Billy answered, with even greater carelessness. "They make us keep him down in the cellar, at the hotel. They won't let us have him in our room. No need of his keeping watch here, eh, Sam, with Ev and Bummy Gilbert safe in Punchard?"

"Sure thing!" Sam assented.

He was delighted. Never since the bullying of

Billy, which Raleigh had put an end to, had he been on such friendly terms with either of the chums.

"Well, good-night, Sam. Gosh! but I 'm sleepy."

Billy stretched his arms above his head, and yawned widely.

"Good-night, Billy."

Breaking again into cheerful whistling, Billy went away.

Sam looked after him till he was out of sight.

"Say, but you 're easy!" he remarked contemptuously. "You belong among the Rubes — you don't belong in New York."

CHAPTER XXI

THE ERUPTION OF SAM

VERY early the next morning, while yet the long winter night was reluctant to give way to the day, Raleigh awoke. For a few minutes he lay quietly in bed, then got up and began dressing, without awakening his chum.

Billy had come home so late the night before that he had found Raleigh already in bed and asleep, so he had had no chance to tell Raleigh of his conversation with the Prince and of his visit to the garage.

The uneasiness which Billy had felt last night seemed this morning transferred to his friend. Raleigh put on his clothes as quickly as he could, and, leaving Billy still sleeping, hurried off to the garage. For so long he had lived in nightly dread of something happening to the car that the instinct was still stronger than the reasoning which told him that here it was safe.

He arrived at the garage at the same time with one of the attendants, who grumbled sleepily at finding the door locked.

"That Sam Peavy never was no good," he growled to Raleigh, as he let himself in with his own key.

"He'd ought to have the place all cleaned up for me, and look at it! I'll bet he's been asleep all night and never did a lick of work. Bet he's asleep yet. *Sam!* Oh, Sam!"

From far in the interior of the building came a faint gurgling sound, which ceased at once.

"There! you heard him snore, didn't you?" the man complained. "Oh, Sam — you lazy mut!"

This time only silence in reply, and, still sleepily grumbling, the attendant set about cleaning out the office.

Raleigh went straight to his car. As he reached its dark corner, he started back at a strange gurgling sound almost beneath his feet.

His heart beating wildly, he stooped down and saw the body of a man, and over it a dog, his teeth apparently buried in the man's throat.

For an instant Raleigh was frozen rigid with horror. Nor was it lessened when, his dilated eyes becoming more accustomed to the gloom, he recognized his own collie.

"*Merk!*" he screamed, and sprang toward him, thinking the dog had gone mad and murdered a man.

He gave him a violent kick in the ribs, which threw him six feet away, and stooped to lift the figure, calling to the attendant for help.

The figure moaned, only half-conscious.

"Bring some water!" Raleigh shouted. "I'm afraid my dog has killed some one."

The sleepy attendant, who had been slow to respond at first, now came running up with a bucket of water and a mop, with which he had been swabbing up the floor. He turned the switch which flooded this corner of the room with light.

"Why, it 's Sam!" he cried. "He 's dead!" And frightened out of his wits, he began swabbing Sam's face with the mop.

Sam scrambled to his feet, sputtering oaths through the dirty water which filled his mouth. He had really been more scared than hurt. Merk's sharp teeth had not even broken his skin, though they had encircled his neck in a terrifying manner.

When he found himself on his feet again, safe and sound, he spluttered and gurgled and hissed, like a red-hot flatiron in a bucket of water.

"I 'll have you arrested — both of yous!" he bellowed. "You, Mike, what did you mean by stuffing that mop in my mouth? You did it a-purpose." Then turning furiously on Raleigh, he roared: "*You 'll* get to Paris — I guess *not!* You 'll be in jail, that 's where you 'll be. The cop on this beat 's a friend of mine. I 'll have you pinched. Oh! just wait."

Sam was fairly dancing with rage, his face distorted with the passion he would have liked to wreak on some one at once. Just then he caught sight of Merk. With a guttural cry, like an animal, he

stooped and picked up a heavy hammer lying on the floor.

"I'll kill that damn dog right now."

Had any of the three been in a condition to notice it, they would before this have heard the patter of running footsteps on the concrete walk.

Furious, and breathless, Billy threw himself upon big Sam, and wrenched the hammer from his hand.

"You'll—kill Merk—will you?" he gasped. "You low-lived—trai—torous scoun—drel! You'll—kill Merk—because he—defended our—car—when you—came to—wreck it. You—"

Billy's breath failed him completely, and he struck Sam a stinging blow in the face.

Sam did not return the blow. He was opening and shutting his mouth, like a fish out of water. He would have hesitated at no lie to extricate himself from his predicament had his dull wits vouchsafed him a plausible one.

"I never done nothing to your car," he finally asserted sullenly.

"No, I guess—you didn't. Couldn't—very well, with Merk—sitting on your—chest. But you schemed with—Kotzalki to—"

"Never saw Kotzalki," Sam began to bluster. "I was jes' sweeping out the garage—"

"*Sweeping out!*" Billy shouted so fiercely that Sam shrank back from him. "Then, what were you

—doing with that hammer? What did—you have those tools for?"

He pointed to several heavy wrenches on the floor, which the others had not noticed.

"Caught with the goods on, this time," Mike jeered. "Guess we'd better go call your cop friend."

With each word of accusation, each bit of proof, Sam shuffled off a few feet, while Billy relentlessly followed him. Mike, in keen enjoyment of Sam's discomfiture, hovered about the two, throwing in a word now and then "to sick the little feller onto Sam."

Raleigh sank down on his knees beside the collie.

"Oh, Merk! Merk!" he sobbed, with his arms around the dog's neck. "I didn't know—forgive me—forgive me!"

And Merk licked Raleigh's face, and put a paw on his shoulder, and in every doggish way tried to tell his master that he understood and forgave him for the undeserved kick.

CHAPTER XXII

"THEY 'RE OFF"

AND now came the hour for the actual starting. One by one the cars came out, looking more like peddler's wagons than like racing automobiles. They were loaded with all the things their drivers thought might come in handy to make their way through the wilds ahead of them. They had block-and-tackle to pull themselves out of gullies; coils of rope to pull themselves through rivers; long poles for prying themselves out of mud-holes; an assortment of furs to keep an Indian tribe warm; little shelter tents for sleeping in the open; tools to outfit a machinist's shop; spare tires, spare tubes, spare springs, spare bolts — and even, as one wag remarked, the drivers had spare faces.

The *Phœnix Bird*, among all the cars, attracted the most attention. It had caught the popular fancy. To see it standing upright on its two wheels seemed little less than a miracle to the mass of sightseers, who were clustered so thickly in Times Square that they threatened to break through the roof of the subway.

"*Ain't* she a bird?" was the usual comment when

the name of the car became known. And whether it was the suggestion of its name, or whether the imagination of some reporter had been fired by Kipling's *Night Mail*, at any rate one of the afternoon papers asserted, in type three inches high, that Raleigh had so perfected the principle of the gyroscope that it was able not only to overcome the ordinary laws of equilibrium, but the law of gravitation itself, and that as soon as the *Phœnix Bird* was away from the more thickly populated parts of the country, it would soar into the air and make a bee-line for Paris. And for days after this the more credulous of trans-Atlantic passengers kept raking the sky with their binoculars, in hopes of sighting the *Bird* on its flight.

But of all this the two young inventors knew nothing. They were entirely too much occupied in trying to keep within some respectable distance of the other contestants in the race. The high hopes with which they started off slumped most dismally as they quickly ascertained what a tremendous advantage the other motors had over them in the matter of speed and power.

Through the suburbs of the metropolis, where speed regulations were in force, the *Phœnix Bird* bowled merrily along in the lead of the racers; but as soon as they reached the open country she was like a poodle in a troup of greyhounds.

One car after another swept by, with ironical

shout or handwave. Tizaine, of the *Briquette*, kissed his hand to them with French theatricalness. The *Yankee Doodle* was the last to pass them, and Hotstough throttled down for an instant beside them.

"Well, good-bye, boys," he shouted cheerfully. "See you later, in Paris."

His cut-out snorted, and the *Yankee Doodle* vanished in a cloud of dust.

Blythe, their official correspondent, from the rear seat leaned out and examined the end of the car.

"Anything the matter?" Billy asked sharply.

"I was just looking to see if we'd forgotten to pull up the anchor; but I see we have n't."

He spoke in a hopeless tone of voice, and Raleigh set his teeth. They were really not going at such a bad rate of speed; but they were up against the very best and most powerful cars of the world, and no wonder they appeared slow.

"They 've sure got the legs on us," Blythe went on dismally. "I suppose by the time we reach Chicago, we 'll read about the finish of the race in Paris."

His extreme pessimism acted like a cold shower on Raleigh. It invigorated his own drooping spirits, and he burst into a laugh.

Blythe regarded him with gloomy eyes.

"You are young!" he announced sadly. "You are young!"

CHAPTER XXIII

BLYTHE IS INSPIRED TO POETRY

For the first four days it appeared as if the contest for supremacy lay only between the *Capri* and the *Asquith Flyer*. Minor accidents delayed all the other big cars, at one point or other; and these two forged far ahead.

"They just *are* within telegraphing distance of us," Blythe groaned.

Billy grinned. He had begun to get accustomed to the older man's pessimistic attitude, and did not mind it so much.

"What makes *me* tired," he answered, "is for the *Liebig* to break an axle, send for another, put it in place, and still keep ahead of us."

Raleigh said nothing. Anxiously he looked up at the sky. Not a cloud was in it. The glorious fall weather and the smooth, dry roads made the going unusually good.

"Yes, it 's good weather," Blythe croaked, noticing Raleigh's gaze at the sky; "but you need n't think it will be like this the whole way. Wait till it begins to storm and snow. Then you 'll see us stop going at all. I dare say we 'll get stuck somewhere,

and they 'll dig us out in the spring, frozen stiff — with grim determination on our faces, and the said faces still turned to far-distant Paris. Gad! what a poem that would make —

Stiff and stark they sat,
Gyroscope mute,
She was a beaut ——

— No, that is n't right — sounds as if it were a comic poem. Besides, I expect she 'd have toppled over and spilled us out."

About this time the occupants of the *Phœnix Bird* began to notice a difference in the reception they received in the various towns they passed through. The fickle newspapers, and the more fickle public, having found out that the queer car stood no chance in the race, changed their first admiration into merciless ridicule. A new verb was born into the slang of the day, " to phœnix," which indicated anything but swift motion.

Of this general ridicule they were not long left ignorant. The spectators at the roadside began to receive them with ironical jeers, and cries of "Here come the comical kids." The reason for this last was made plain when in Toledo a man thrust into their hands the supplement of a Sunday newspaper containing a full-page colored cartoon, entitled —

THE KOMIKAL KIDS
AND THEIR
PHUNNY PHŒNIX FIEND

— which pictured all kinds of misadventures into which they were supposed to have fallen through the eccentric behavior of the gyroscope. At one time it was shown going sideways through the streets of a crowded city, sweeping pedestrians and all traffic before it like a broom. Again, it insisted on traveling upside down, its passengers, with terror-stricken faces, clinging on underneath. In one spot it was supposed to have stopped and spun around like a top, for three hours; and then decided to go backward for a whole day — which explained, entirely to the satisfaction of the artist, its undignified position at the tail-end of the procession.

The victims of all this could not help laughing at the absurd figure they cut in the pictures, sore though they felt over them.

Blythe, on the other hand, seemed quite encouraged by the present attitude of the public toward the *Phœnix Bird* and its inventors.

"You've got the science, boys, but you haven't got the punch," he reassured them. (Blythe had at one time "covered" prize-fights for a San Francisco paper, and ring-side expressions still slipped from him occasionally.) "Wait till you make a fifty horsepower *Phœnix Bird*, and you'll have them all guessing."

CHAPTER XXIV

LUNCHEON AT COLDGRAVE

BEYOND Chicago the country was becoming ever more sparsely settled, and the roads were now only good because they had been frozen hard and then worn tolerably smooth. The drivers of the *Yankee Doodle* and of the *Dixie* blessed their stars that the bottomless black Western soil was frozen into adamant; but the drivers of the foreign cars, accustomed to their own good roads, grumbled continually.

"Vas iss der *yuse* of hundert-zwanzig horse-bower," grumbled Wildejagd, "ofer roads like dese? I make better time mit a shteam roller."

But if the foreigners were not satisfied, they were soon to know worse. For the first time since the race started, the sky from east to west became overcast. Darker and darker it grew, and bleaker and bleaker the landscape. The occupants of the *Phœnix Bird* watched the gathering storm with perhaps more interest than any of the other contestants.

"There it comes!" shouted Billy, holding out his furry arm on which rested one dainty snowflake.

Blythe looked at him in surprise.

"Yes, 'there it comes,'" he mimicked. "And when

it has 'comed,' we 'll spend four months in this inviting winter resort" — he waved his hand at the desolate countryside — "or we 'll take the train back to New York."

A humorous smile played about Raleigh's lips, but he said nothing. Billy gave himself a beary hug in his big coat, but he, too, added no words to his first exclamation.

"See the little flakelets descending," Blythe mused presently. "So white, so innocent — yet so sad. Snow is emblematic of oblivion. Flake by flake it falls — each by itself only an atom — yet all together hiding the whole face of the earth. Just so, day by day forgetfulness comes to those that have passed away, and thrusts them into oblivion."

Blythe shook his head mournfully, and wiped away a large flake which flew into his ear.

"I dare say I have written twenty elegies and dirges about snow, but only one of them was ever accepted. And that was published in the humorous department by a man whom I had always regarded as a friend."

Conversation now became rather difficult on account of the swirling snowflakes. When once the snow had made up its mind to come down, it lost no time in doing so. From the black clouds masses fell as if to overwhelm the traveler before he could get to shelter. Raleigh was forced to change from his high gear; and by the time they reached the next

town, Coldgrave, they were plodding through six heavy inches of snow.

Here they stopped for luncheon. While they were eating, the snow came down more heavily than ever.

The landlord of the miserable little hotel viewed the fat flakes complacently.

"Guess you folks won't be able to keep on any farther," he said, with a sympathy which vainly strove to hide the satisfaction he felt at the prospect. "I have n't seen so heavy a fall of snow for eighteen years — leastways, not in the time it 's been snowing."

"How deep is it now?" Raleigh asked.

"Must be over a foot already, and no telling how deep it'll be by night. It 's coming down like Sam Hill. A team of oxen could n't hardly get along now. But after it clears up — which I guess won't be later than day after to-morrer (or the next day) — the farmers 'll break out the road. Then in a week or so it might get packed down so 's you could travel in that there machine o' yourn."

"A week in Coldgrave!" muttered Blythe disconsolately.

"Seems as if that would be a proper subject for a dirge," Billy whispered to him. He as well as Raleigh was in unaccountably good spirits.

"How much do we owe you for luncheon?" Raleigh asked the landlord.

The latter's face fell.

"You ain't goin' to try to keep on?" he asked shrilly. "Why, you boys don't know what our roads is. You'll be buried up to the neck in the drifts, and the farmers 'll charge you — gosh! they 'll charge you ten dollars to pull you out. They 're mostly robbers around here when it comes to chargin'."

"I dare say," Raleigh assented. "How much for the lunch?"

"A dollar apiece," the landlord said sulkily. Then, as he saw Raleigh pull out his purse to pay the double charge without protest, he added greedily, "And you'll have to pay me another dollar for me lettin' you stand your machine under my shed. Them's my reg'lar rates for ottomobils," he ended cantankerously.

"Come on, Billy," Raleigh said, when he had paid the landlord. "Blythe, we shan't be ready to start for another half-hour or so. You might as well stay in here and keep warm," and the two boys waded out through the snow to the shed where the *Bird* stood.

CHAPTER XXV

"THE CONVERSATION FENDER"

UNDERNEATH the shed, for the use of which the landlord, for the first time in his career, had been able to charge a dollar, stood the *Phœnix Bird*.

To some it might have appeared a dejected little car, with the snow drifting in around her wheels, and outside the deep, far-reaching white, through which no wheels could force their way; but its two drivers wore anything except a doleful air as they approached it.

Busily, as if good roads and smiling sunshine awaited them, they set to work. jacking up the front wheel, unscrewing a certain piece, fitting it on, then another, jacking up the rear wheel, and so on. They worked with a swift order that showed everything to have been prepared in advance.

"*Do* you think it will go here, as it did at home?" Billy asked anxiously.

Raleigh's face was pale and his lips dry with excitement.

"We shall find out in a few minutes now."

There was no one around. The storm had discouraged the usual knot of loafers. Like the landlord,

they thought there would be plenty of time to examine the car before the roads became passable again.

For all their haste it seemed to the motorists to take hours to make the car ready, though it had not actually been more than three quarters of an hour.

At last every part was in place, every bolt tightened.

"She's ready!" Billy said, in subdued tones of exhilaration.

Raleigh ran his eyes over the machine from stem to stern.

"Yes, she's ready," he murmured, an ecstasy of hope in his voice. "Billy, you bring her round to the door, while I go rout out Blythe."

The correspondent had settled his long angular body in the most comfortable attitude, like a half-opened jackknife, in a big armchair beside the stove. He was dozing in the warmth, and looked up drowsily as Raleigh came in.

"Thought it about time you gave up whatever fool scheme you had, and came in to get warm," he remarked. "I've been evolving a scheme, myself, with some sense in it. *Hibernating!* What do you think of that? If a bear can do it, why should n't a man? Think how you could save time when you had n't anything in particular to do. Think what a boon it would be to the poor laboring classes, when

they were out on a strike — just hibernate! Cut off all living expenses, except rent. I think if I lived in Coldgrave I 'd become a permanent hibernator."

"I guess you 'll have to put it off for a bit and get busy."

"Get busy? At what, for heaven's sake? Snowballing?"

"The snow does n't pack well enough for that."

Blythe at last was struck with something unusual in Raleigh's manner.

"You seem mighty happy over something or other," he said sleepily.

"I am. We 're going to catch up with some of these other cars in the next few days."

Blythe's eyelids sank gradually down over his eyes. "Quit your fooling," he murmured.

"If you don't look out, you 'll be left behind," Raleigh continued.

Honk! honk! sounded imperious blasts from outside.

Blythe came out of his hibernating with speed.

"What 's that?" he asked sharply.

"It 's the *Phœnix Bird*, ready for passengers," Raleigh shouted exultantly.

The newspaper man rushed to the window and looked out. There stood the gyrocar, apparently perched up on the feathery snow, her wheels only sinking in a few inches.

"Well, I 'll be dog-nabbed," murmured Blythe,

thoroughly flabbergasted. "You 're *actually* going!"

"Sure thing! Billy," Raleigh tapped on the window and called through the glass, "take a turn around the yard to convince our distinguished friend."

With an answering grin, Billy let in the clutch, and the *Phœnix Bird* moved off over the snow.

"Wha-what keeps it from sinking?" he gasped.

"The 'conversation fender.'"

Blythe looked at Raleigh reproachfully, then suddenly clutched his forehead with one hand, and his companion's shoulder with the other.

"Tell me, quick! Is something the matter with my head — or does n't the front wheel turn?"

"Of course it does n't turn," Raleigh answered, with fine condescension. "One wheel 's all we need in the snow."

The older man gave a pathetic, puzzled look at the younger, and went over to his furs.

"When you get time," he said humbly, "you might explain things to this poor weak brain of mine. I *told* you I did n't understand machinery."

"All right; but come on now, so that we shall lose no more time."

Unnoticed by more than half a dozen people in the sleepy place, the gyrocar drove out into the storm. The snow had already become so deep, and threw such a blinding veil over the landscape,

that but for the fence-posts and telegraph poles they might easily have wandered off the road without knowing it.

To Blythe's increasing mystification, the gyrocar lightly rode over the snow, as if it were smoothest asphalt, or rather as if it were a firm greensward; for there was a softness and buoyancy about their going such as no mere road ever afforded.

With the insatiable curiosity of the born news-gatherer, Blythe was all over the car, craning his neck and wearing his eyes out to understand this mystery. Presently he made out a little black three-cornered bit of wood, like the perked-up head of a snake, steadily traveling a few feet in front of the car through the feathery snow.

"Why! *it's on skis!*" he shouted.

Raleigh assented, trying to keep his pride from bubbling forth in an unmannerly way.

"Great Scott!" Blythe relapsed into a dumb-founded silence, until a certain idea came to him.

"Oh! see here, fellows," he expostulated. "It's all very well to stuff me, but if both wheels are on runners, what in thunder makes it go ahead?"

The two young men burst out laughing at the injured tone of the other's voice.

"It's this way," Raleigh explained. "There's a long runner under the front wheel, reaching nearly back to the driving-wheel. Then there's another shorter one out behind. But the driving-wheel itself

has a deeply grooved jacket on it, and goes down into the snow."

"You see the front runner packs the snow," Billy put in, "and the rear runner can be raised or lowered to give just the grip we want."

"Oh, I see. But whatever made you think of it?"

"When the idea of going into the race came to us, we thought there would be a lot of snow to contend with, between New York and the good roads in Germany, so we invented this scheme —"

"*You* invented it, you mean," Billy interrupted.

"Anyhow, now we 'd rather have snow than not."

"I should think you would. Why, you 'll just make rings around the other cars, while the deep snow lasts."

"That 's what we 've been hoping for ever since we started; but it looked rather desperate at one time."

With admiring eyes the correspondent noted their swift progress over the white country.

"Does n't she just fly along!" he exclaimed.

"Wait till you see her on a crust," Billy said. "That 's the time when you 'll think you 're on a Vanderbilt Cup Racer."

CHAPTER XXVI

A NOTCH ON THE REVOLVER

THE *Phœnix Bird* halted only for a bag of crackers, a pound of cheese, and some gasolene at a country store. The moments of this momentous day were too precious to waste for food or rest.

On and on they went. The short day faded out, but through the mist of falling flakes filtered light enough from the invisible moon to make it easy for them to see their way.

With every mile the little car traveled more smoothly and rhythmically. It was as if the motor understood the opportunity that lay before it, and was going to make the most of it.

Fatigue and hunger were lost to the three passengers in the thought that they were overhauling their rivals hand over hand.

About midnight they came to Omaha, and glided through the deserted streets to the hotel at which they were to stop. A sleepy clerk stared at them as they entered the lobby, white as polar bears.

"Bad night for a walk," he commented, with professional affability, pushing the hotel register toward them.

"It is *that*," the newspaper man assented. "But it's a thundering good night to get up an appetite in. Now, you hustle out some food, and then — beds!"

The clerk was disposed to remonstrate at serving food at such an hour, until he learned who the newcomers were. "Oh, of course, in that case I'll try to find you something to eat," he said. He was only mildly surprised at their advent. He had been quite two years from his native village and displayed an exaggerated man-of-the-world manner. Nothing really astonished him.

"It must have been quite an experience, coming through this storm," he said pleasantly. "Another car, the *Bonicastel*, was here yesterday. They were kicking like steers about the roads, said they could n't make over eight miles an hour to save 'em. I am surprised at your coming through snow like this. (So much he would admit.) — Yes, I'll see that you get your gasolene all right. — What time did you say you want to be called for breakfast in the morning?"

"Three o'clock," Raleigh answered.

"Three o'clock? Why, it's nearly one now. Just as you say, of course. I'll see that you get something to eat then."

"Are n't you cutting the night rather short?" Blythe asked. He was no early riser by nature. "Yes, I dare say we ought to make the most of

this opportunity. I suppose there's no telegraph office open now?" he asked, turning to the clerk.

"It would n't do you any good if it were," the clerk replied. "The wires are down everywhere. The Western Union and the Postal both quit taking any more messages early this afternoon."

The short time of rest which the crew of the *Phœnix Bird* permitted themselves passed as passes a whiff of smoke in a hurricane.

Sodden with unslept sleep, they turned out of bed at the call of the clerk, partook of the cold, uninviting food put before them, and set out on their journey again. They were well supplied with oil and gasolene; for the man-of-the-world clerk had proved a man of his word; and they had the remnants of their breakfast in a paper bag, to facilitate constant travel.

There was yet no faintest hint of morning in the sky. Night brooded over the countryside as deeply as when they had come into Omaha. Indeed, their brief period of rest seemed like a tantalizing dream from which they had been all too suddenly awakened, and the only real thing was this endless going forward through an unending white night.

The moon must have set by this time, but in the universal white it was still easy to make out their way. The snowflakes had become smaller, and the weather somewhat colder.

Their directions were explicit: "Follow the telephone wires." The wires were down in many places, but the poles still guided them. In this matter of finding their way, the young drivers had often to congratulate themselves on the presence of Blythe. The newspaper man might not understand about machinery, but he had a truly marvelous sense of direction, of orientation.

A map was to him a living thing. When he had pored over it in the morning, it was as if for the day he were traveling through familiar country. On such a trip as this, this faculty of his was worth much in preventing loss of time through taking the wrong road when no one was at hand to direct them.

By six o'clock there was faint promise in the sky that the night would not last forever. Shortly afterwards they passed through a small town — a town asleep.

Only one mortal was on the streets. He stared at the rapid approach of the *Phœnix Bird*, as if turned to a pillar of salt. Only when they had passed him did he come to life enough to shout something after them.

Billy, on the back seat, had an ear less muffled up than the other two.

"Did you hear what that man said?" he asked sharply.

"No, what was it?" Raleigh replied.

"He said the *Asquith Flyer* was here, with something or other smashed."

The effect of these words was tremendous. Weariness fell from the occupants of the *Phœnix Bird* and left them lively and cheerful as crickets.

On the still air broke whoops and shouts which brought many a disheveled head to the windows as they passed along; and the next morning there was great discussion in the town. Certain people declared that they had seen an automobile with a gang of drunken ruffians, yelling like Comanche Indians, tearing furiously through the town. Other people, not so quick from their beds, pooh-poohed the idea of anything so preposterous, although they had to admit that they certainly thought they had heard what sounded like shouting.

But out in the open country a tall lank man, with much effort of his furry fingers, managed to open his pocket-knife. Then he drew forth his revolver, and solemnly cut a notch in the handle.

"One of 'em," he said.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GREAT SNOW

THE rapacious landlord of the hotel at Coldgrave had not exaggerated when he declared that he had not seen such a snowstorm for eighteen years. Had he waited a little longer he need not have limited it to eighteen years: in the known history of America so much snow had never fallen at one time before.

It was hardly a "storm" in the ordinary use of the word. There was no battle of the elements, no raging winds and piling drifts; but through the still air all the moisture of the skies seemed descending in a white feathery mass. So steadily and so strongly did the snow come down that it was as if, at once and forever, the earth was to be blotted out by this white blanket, which hid all its defects, covered all its brown ugliness, and was too deep for men, machinery, or animals to force their way through.

Trains were stopped, or stalled between cities; the trolley lines were tied up; carriages and wagons could not move a step; and telegraph and telephone lines were universally down. Even sleighs were of no use, since the snow was so deep that horses could not wade through it.

Only the Indian, and the trapper on his snowshoes, and the sportsman on his skis, were not deprived of the means of locomotion. To these must be added the *Phœnix Bird*, which sped as swiftly over snow four feet deep as four inches.

Each new place received it with a stupefaction of amazement. To each it arrived as a complete surprise, since no town had been able to warn the next of what to expect.

For several days the only means of communication left to the northern part of the United States was wireless telegraphy, and this proved entirely inadequate to the sudden flood of business that descended upon it.

At Denver, Blythe finally managed to get a short dispatch through to New York announcing the bare fact of their arrival. This was printed under various ironical heads in the newspapers, such as

THE KIDS KIDDING US

and the like. The *Sun* added to it the following caustic comment: —

> Those ingenious young fellow citizens of ours who adapted the principle of the gyroscope to the automobile, and whose car, the *Phœnix Bird*, was widely touted as a winner in the present New York to Paris automobile race, have evidently not exhausted their genius in the invention of the car.
>
> Although, while the going was good, the

> *Phœnix Bird* obstinately maintained a position in the rear of all the other contestants, now that there is no going at all, we are asked to believe that it is getting over the country at an even faster rate than when all the circumstances were propitious.
>
> Either this dispatch is a prank of the youthful drivers — a prank of very questionable taste — or else it is the practical joke of some amateur wireless operator, and points again to the necessity for governmental regulation of all wireless telegraph stations.

Little notice of the dispatch was taken, on the whole. America at large was just now so interested in its own experiences in the Great Snow that it had not a thought to expend on the race — especially since it believed the race to be temporarily at a standstill.

In a civilized community a snowstorm, even when it entails some inconvenience or danger, is always a lark. The public fairly reveled in its own adventures in digging its way to grocer or milkman. A bit of primitive hardship was brought to the very doors of men who thought themselves far from such a possibility.

But if the East could not become excited over the progress of the *Phœnix Bird*, there were certain people and places in the West that showed no such indifference.

In Montrose our young travelers found the *Bonicastel* and the *Bismarck*. The crews of both cars

were amicably engaged in a game of "Skaat," quite confident that no one else was making any faster progress than they were, and enjoying their enforced rest hugely.

But when the *Phœnix Bird* dropped down upon them, and after a short stop went on its cheerful way, the other drivers lost their philosophic calm and scurried about as wildly as if any activity of theirs could melt the snow.

"Any message for Paree, Musher Frenchman?" Blythe asked, as they were setting out, with a genial wave of his hand.

The stream of objurgations and ejaculations which this called forth, fairly wafted the *Phœnix Bird* on her way.

But if other drivers were resting, the crew of the gyrocar were enduring the most unremitting toil. For three nights they hardly slept at all. Each notch cut on the handle of Blythe's revolver stimulated them to renewed efforts, though hollows came under their eyes and lines in their cheeks. Their jaws only showed the squarer and more determined. Blythe doubtless felt the strain equally, but no murmur of complaint came from behind the fuzzy beard which had grown up till it nearly hid his lean countenance.

Five notches were on Blythe's revolver before the East really woke up to what was going on. By this time the West was in a perfect fury of enthusiasm.

As the telegraph lines began to be put in working order, they found that the schools were let out to see them pass; banners were hung out in their honor; and banquets arranged — which they did not stop to eat. At Salt Lake City a huge bunting was stretched across the road reading, —

WELCOME TO OUR FAIR CITY
YOUNG SNOWBIRDS

CHAPTER XXVIII

SOME NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

If the newspapers had neglected them at first, they more than made up for it when finally they grasped the situation. Besides superlative descriptions of the *Phœnix Bird's* exploit, there were editorial comments in every paper in the country.

The Boston *Herald* declared that the arrival of an aeroplane in Salt Lake City would not have been "so significant an event. Indeed," it added, "it would have been much less of a feat for an airship to reach Salt Lake City under present conditions than for a motor-car to do so."

The Toledo *Blade*, with considerable imagination surmised that "the performance of the *Phœnix Bird* opens up a new vista in Arctic exploration. A 'dash' to the Pole may become a dash, indeed, with a gyrocar on runners, instead of the slow laborious crawl it now is."

While the Montreal *Evening News*, taking a more practical, everyday view of the achievement, said:—

> It is a well-known fact that a large part of the operating expenses of Northern rail and trolley roads is incurred during the winter months, by the necessity of continu-

ally clearing the tracks of snow. And much of the work must be done by hand, in spite of the numerous mechanical devices continually being invented.

But an entirely new way of meeting the difficulty may be the outcome of the success of the *Phœnix Bird* in riding over, instead of forcing its way through, the snow. Indeed, with it, snow may become as great an advantage as it now is in lumbering.

Every middle-aged man can remember the advent of the trolley car — the "broomstick train," as the poet happily called it — which ousted the horse-car, and by killing the market for medium-grade horses helped to bring on the hard times of '93.

Shall these same men live to see the trolley superseded by the gyrocar, youngest child of man's inventive brain? Truly the world wags fast in this twentieth century of ours.

Somehow Blythe managed to keep track of all the newspaper articles which appeared about the gyrocar. He left every large town laden with a huge bundle of papers, which he shed along the road as he got through with them.

"H'm! you've certainly made a ten-strike with the public, young sirs," he commented, as he glanced over his bundle of papers. "They're fairly raking the place for items about you. — Aha! and here is our old college chump, Sam Peavy again. — Seems as if he all but invented this car himself."

Blythe read on to himself, occasionally quoting bits he thought of especial interest.

"Listen to this: 'Gallant young drivers,'—that's going some.—And here we find, 'With the superb confidence of youth'—it would be pretty hard for you to have the confidence of middle-age just yet.—And here we are again, 'Intrepid young contestants.'—They don't say a word about the noble-browed and bewhiskered newspaper man who watches over you like a mother. Never mind! They won't be describing the style of hosiery I affect, and if I'm not mistaken that's what you two are rapidly drifting toward. If I should charge you regular clipping-bureau rates for these items I regale you with, I'd come home a millionaire."

CHAPTER XXIX

BACK IN PUNCHARD

"Old Man Hawpe" was puttering around his blacksmith's shop one morning in a very ill-humor. He felt "rocky," as he expressed it, and not without reason. The night before he had stayed down in the saloon till past midnight, and when finally he got home, the gate in the fence around his little house had mysteriously disappeared.

He studied the phenomenon for some time; then, enraged at such a perfidious act, he threw his huge bulk against the fence. A panel broke under him, and he fell with it. As he lay helpless, several pickets gave him vicious digs in the back and sides. He lashed out with his arms.

"Billy! Hey, Billy!" he called loudly.

After a long time he remembered that Billy was off "skylarking" in New York. "Ungrateful young whelp!" he muttered.

Somehow he got to bed, and in the morning awoke late to cold discomfort.

The blacksmith missed his son more than he had any idea he should. When Billy was around, there was some semblance of order in the house. The hall stove was always supplied with coal, so that there

was at least one place to warm one's self; and in the pantry there was always something for a hungry man to eat.

They had not had regular meals because Hawpe so frequently was away with companions he preferred to his son. But now that Billy was gone, he began to feel many inconveniences.

This morning it was with a "dark brown" taste in his mouth, and a general feeling of being badly used that the big blacksmith was making ready for his day's work.

No trade came for some time, and this added to Hawpe's ill-humor.

The first person to present himself at the shop was a neatly dressed young man whose appearance bespoke the city. Uncertainly he glanced about.

"I'm looking for Mr. Hawpe," he began tentatively.

The blacksmith glared at him contemptuously.

"Looking for *Mister* Hawpe, are you?" he mimicked in a rough falsetto.

The other grinned cheerfully.

"They told me I'd find 'old man Hawpe' hereabouts. Do you happen to be he?"

"And what if I am?" Hawpe growled, refusing to thaw to the friendliness of the stranger.

"Then you're the father of William Hawpe?"

"Yes, I'm the father of 'Willyum' Hawpe. And what may 'Willyum' have been up to now?"

"Well, Raleigh Kilbreth and he have been up to a clever stunt with their gyrocar the last few days, and the public is mightily interested in everything concerning them."

"Billy's every bit as clever as Raleigh Kilbreth," Hawpe said jealously, "though I suppose they've been telling you in Punchard that Raleigh was the whole show."

"Not at all. I've just seen Squire Kilbreth, and he always spoke of 'the boys,' and of their work together on the car."

"Oh, he did, did he?" Hawpe was mollified. "I'm not denying, you understand, that the idee wasn't Raleigh's; but he'd never have worked it out if it hadn't been for my Billy. Raleigh's got something besides bats in his belfry, though, all right, or he wouldn't have come around me — hiring Billy the way he did."

Encouraged by the tactful reporter, who met all kinds of men in his work, and had learned to get on with them all, Hawpe related the story of the hiring of Billy, and many other incidents about him.

"That boy of yours must be mighty clever with tools. I suppose you taught him," the reporter surmised.

Hawpe straightened himself up and gave a tug at his rusty waistcoat.

"Yes, I taught him — taught him all he knows. Tools and machinery always was easy for me. Seems

like I could tell how to fix a thing soon 's I looked at it — and Billy 's just the same."

The reporter nodded. "I see. Inherited it from you."

Hawpe flushed, and gave his touzled hair a clumsy swipe with his hand.

"But what was it you said they 'd just been a-doing?" he asked.

The reporter told him.

Delighted, Hawpe slapped his knee.

"By gum! that was smart of 'em. Slid right over the snow, did they? and caught up with the other fellers, while they were stuck tight. I say, those kids 'll have a chance in the race after all, won't they?"

For half an hour the reporter talked with the blacksmith, and the latter entirely forgot his ill-humor in the interest of the conversation.

"Very much obliged to you," the reporter said, as he put his wad of paper into his pocket and prepared to take his leave. "There will be a photographer up here to-morrow to take a lot of pictures: the shop where they worked, Squire Kilbreth's house, your house, and so forth. We 're going to have a special article about them next Sunday."

After he was gone, Hawpe's first impulse was to go down to the saloon and brag to his good friend the saloon-keeper, and to whomever else might be there, of the fame that had come upon his son.

Before he could carry out this plan a milkman came in to have his horse shod. Being a little short of ready cash,—and without money there was little pleasure in going to the saloon,—he thought he might as well do this job first. But while he pulled the bellows and shaped the shoe to the foot of the old white horse, who stood there sleepily, Hawpe's brain was more active than it had been in years.

"So they were writing pieces about his Billy," he thought. "A New York paper, too; and they were going to send up a photographer to take pictures of the place where Billy had worked, and where he lived."

The idea was not entirely pleasant. Of course Squire Kilbreth's house would look all right in the paper—it was one of the best houses in town; but his own—

When his wife had been alive, she had had vines trained up around the door, and some flower-beds along the fence, and Billy had kept the grass-plot cut regularly. It had been a pretty cottage in those days. Now—

He recalled the time when a loose branch of the crimson rambler had brushed across his face and scratched his nose. That was last summer, and he had torn the whole vine up by the roots—just the way he had smashed the fence last night. The flower-beds had long ago grown up in weeds, and the grass-plot, too. Billy had been too busy working

with Raleigh to take care of his poor old father's yard.

Hawpe's compassion for himself changed to dull remorse as he remembered that Billy had not neglected the little lawn until he himself had smashed the lawn-mower with an axe, one day, after stumbling over it.

When the old white horse was shod, and the milkman had taken him away, Hawpe shut up his shop, and walked out to his home, not far distant.

Yes, it was a dreary-looking place. The snow, of course, hid what had once been flower-beds and lawn, but the fence was disreputable. Gloomily Hawpe noted that the gate was in its usual place.

CHAPTER XXX

"IF A MAN'S GOT ANY GIMP TO HIM"

WELL, he'd fix up the fence, anyway."

Hawpe was a man of action, for good or for evil. He no sooner made up his mind than he set to work, and shortly had repaired the damage of last night.

That made things look a little better. But the place was still very bare and bleak. His wife had wanted to set out some trees, especially evergreens, but he had always laughed at her for it. They'd all be dead and gone before the trees were any size, he used to say.

And now Mary was dead and gone, but if he'd set out the trees when she wished, they would be there to grace the picture of her boy's home.

Hawpe shouldered his axe and set off for the woods. At noon he came back ravenously hungry. He thought of the hot free lunch in the saloon, and hesitated.

"Have n't time for it," he decided, with a shake of his shaggy head.

As he passed the grocery store he bought a can of sardines, a loaf of bread and some butter. His appetite made a banquet of these, and he dispatched

them in ten minutes. Then from a neighbor he hired a horse and pung, and set off again for the woods.

Pilkins was the name of the man from whom Hawpe hired the horse, and late that afternoon Pilkins came in to his wife, bubbling over with amusement.

"Say, Hannah Jane, old man Hawpe must be drunker'n a boiled owl to-day. He ain't been at his shop sence mornin'; hired old Bet from me; went into the woods, and come back with a load of — what d' you s'pose?"

Mrs. Pilkins cast wildly about in her mind for the most improbable possibility.

"Snow," she hazarded.

"*Snow!*" Mr. Pilkins repeated in great disgust. "Now what would he be bringing home a load of snow for?"

"You said he was drunk," Mrs. Pilkins argued timidly, "an' I thought —"

"Jes' like a woman to think of a fool thing like that. No, 't war n't snow — though 't might 's well 'a' been. He brung home a load o' *Chris'mus trees.*"

"For the land's sakes!" Mrs. Pilkins exclaimed. "What 'd he want with them?"

"Dunno. Guess he must 'a' forgot what time o' year it was. I thought I'd do a neighborly act by him, so I went out and says to him: 'Hawpe,' says I, 'don't you know 't ain't Chris'mus Day?' But

he answered me real short: 'Is that so?' says he. 'T ain't April Fool's Day neither.' He turned his back on me, so I did n't say no more. And then what d' you s'spose he done with them trees?"

Mrs. Pilkins was too wise to hazard a guess this time. "What 'd he do?" she asked.

"*He's set 'em all up in the snow around his house.* Jest look out o' the winder and see for yourself."

Mrs. Pilkins rushed to the window fast enough.

"Well, if you ain't spoke the truth!" she exclaimed, as if this were an unusual performance in her husband. After a rapt contemplation of the Hawpe house, she added: "They dew look real pretty, though. I 'd no idee they 'd brighten up his house like that. I declare, Si, I wish you 'd cut a load to-morrow, and set 'em up around *our* house."

Unmindful of what his neighbors might think of him, Hawpe considered that he had done a good day's work, and felt a glow of self-satisfaction. The clusters of little pine trees stood up in the snow as naturally as if they had grown there for years.

He stood off and surveyed his cottage critically, then gave a satisfied chuckle.

"Come on and photograph, if you want to," he roared to the world at large. "I guess Billy can live in a house with a proper fence around it, and trees in the front yard, as well as Raleigh."

It was evening. After the elation of his labors had somewhat subsided, Hawpe became aware of a consuming thirst within him. He was hungry, too, but did not think of this.

He gulped down three glasses of water, but they only partly satisfied him.

"Guess I'll go down to Tim's and get a nice cool schooner," he said to himself in a nonchalant way. "Have n't had a drink to-day."

He tried to imagine that he was both surprised at the discovery, and that there was nothing unusual in it, — although he knew that all day long he had subconsciously been fighting the desire to go to Tim's, and, moreover, that it was a very unusual condition for him to be in.

"There 's nothing else to do to-night, anyway," he assured himself. "If Billy were here I would n't go."

It was a very weak argument; but any argument is strong enough to convince men of the propriety of doing that which they wish to.

He sauntered along as if it were really a matter of indifference to him where he went.

At the saloon were his friends. There he would be met with shouts of welcome; and there he would be treated, and treat, on the strength of Billy's success.

But something other than his usual impulses were at work. Was it the day spent cleanly among the young pine trees; or was it the memory of his

wife — of her flower-beds and roses, and (for the thought would not down) of her unhappiness and her reproachful eyes — she who never had reproached him with words?

Hawpe's conscience, long dormant, would not let him off as easily as usual to-night.

He thought of Billy "in the papers," and then of himself as he probably should be a few hours from now, staggering home, with the world reeling around him, his pockets empty, — and the gate in the fence once more gone.

"Might n't know the house at all, with those pretty trees around it," he soliloquized with grim humor.

"'T ain't treating Billy right," he muttered, a few minutes later.

Yet his footsteps kept on, though slowly.

The bell of the church began to ring.

"I wonder what that 's for?" He was glad to get his thoughts away from his own shortcomings.

It was the bell of his own church, to which he had not been for years. His way led past it, and he saw a notice that there was a temperance meeting there.

He contemplated it a long time.

"Guess that means me, all right."

Moved by a sudden, freakish impulse, in his working clothes as he was, he joined the people going up the steps, and took a seat in a rear pew.

There was a good speaker that night. Sometimes Hawpe listened to him, nodding his head at certain truths that came home to him; at other times his mind wandered to Billy.

"If I go down to Tim's to-night, I 'll get drunk, sure 's you 're born," his thoughts ran on. "'William Hawpe's drunken old father' — how 'd that look in the papers? Raleigh ain't ashamed of *his* father — has n't got any cause to be."

He turned from his own disagreeable reflections to the words of the speaker. The latter was a good, pious man. He was declaring at the end of his sermon that no man could stop drinking who did not have the church to help him in his struggle. A man might have all the good resolutions in the world, but unless he went regularly to church, his endeavors would assuredly end in failure.

Something in this declaration — something in the speaker himself — roused all the native combativeness in Hawpe. He rose to his feet in the hush which followed the close of the speaker's words, and announced calmly, but in words that could be heard all over the church: —

"If a man 's got any gimp to him, he can stop drinking if he 's a mind to — *and I 'm going to!*" and marched out of the church.

CHAPTER XXXI

ACROSS THE CONTINENT

It would take too long to follow the *Phœnix Bird* step by step across the continent to San Francisco. Arduous as it was, it was only a preliminary to the real work to be done in Siberia. Those who are interested in all the details of the race will find a conscientious and accurate description of every mud-hole, of every rock, of every rut and bump between the cities of New York and San Francisco in the voluminous work of Lauterwörter, who traveled with the *Liebig*. Or if you would see another side of the race, read the four hundred and fifty pages of impassioned rhetoric produced by Antonio Rusticano, of the *Ischia*.

Rusticano, in language which fairly sizzles, has descanted at length on all the real and imaginary evil traits of America,—American mud, American snow, American cold, and American heat. At least twenty times in his book does he exclaim with fervor, "The roads now became absolutely impassable," and then goes on to tell how he managed to pass over them; or, "Our labors had been so terrific that our legs had no more strength in them than

wet rags," and then describes minutely the subsequent wonders performed by the wet-rag legs.

Without doubt the difficulties encountered were enormous, and not the least trying part was the knowledge that for six or seven long months they would be continued.

Of these trials and tribulations the *Phœnix Bird* had somewhat less than her share. There were various reasons for this. As we have seen, the snow was a help instead of being a hindrance; secondly, its single track not only enabled it to pass easily along many places where the four-wheeled cars found themselves too wide, but it relieved her of all the side-strain which was responsible for so many of the breakages. Her lighter weight, too, was of the greatest possible advantage; and finally, perhaps from the fact that the gyrocar was entirely made by hand by the young inventors themselves, no weakness or flaw developed, such as were bound to appear in machines turned out by the hundreds from the factories.

Yet the *Phœnix Bird* only continued to gain on her rivals by taking advantage of every opportunity which Fortune threw in her way: a bit of footpath, too narrow for the others, would gain them miles; once a chasm filled to the brim with snow, over which they glided on their runners, cut off a long détour.

Blythe proved a veritable sleuth-hound in the dis-

covery of by-paths and short-cuts. Besides his own sense of orientation, he seemed able to extract intelligible directions from the stupidest or the most surly persons they met. Not for nothing had he interviewed so many men in his newspaper career.

But even with all their advantages it was a hard and wearisome journey. In a short race of a few miles, or even of a few hundred, the intense excitement will carry the contestants through almost incredible difficulties. But when the strain is stretched over twenty-five thousand miles and months of time, nothing but bulldog grit and endurance can carry one through.

There were parts of this trip which ever afterwards, to the passengers of the gyrocar, were only a barren nightmare of white and cold, of little sleep and long hours of dumb endurance. Their day began hours before the sun arose. By the brilliant starlight, or by the lighter but more deceptive moonlight, they would set out, knowing that it would be deep night again before they could hope for a little rest.

There were times when they lost track of the other cars. If the going was good, they only knew that they themselves were losing ground. If it was bad, they hoped they were gaining. There were other times when they were so fatigued that they cared not whether they were ahead or behind.

At the worst of these times Blythe would pipe up

and sing. His songs were only half-articulate — weird tunes he had learned before the mast, or among the Indians of Alaska, or from the Zulus of South Africa.

In no part of the globe was it conceivable that his voice would have won him commendation. Indeed, he once confided to his companions that he never ventured to sing except in the desert parts of the world. It was less musical than a guinea hen's voice; yet somehow or other it cheered up his hearers, though the words, when they could be made out, were invariably of the most lugubrious or sentimental description. Raleigh suspected him sometimes of singing words of his own composition, to the rambling, outlandish tunes. But in these desolate wastes any human sound was welcome.

CHAPTER XXXII

HARNESSED FOR LIFE

In bleak, wind-swept Nevada, where desolate mining-camps were the only towns they saw, the cold came down upon them. They had had uncomfortably cold days before, but this was something different.

It was as if the glacial period had come back again to North America, and, resuming its reign, decreed that no living being should exist here any longer.

Had the motor not been air-cooled, assuredly any non-freezing mixture whatsoever would have been congealed at their first stop.

They suffered intensely; it seemed as if they could never become warm again. They stopped what desultory conversation they had had, and sat in silence, crouched down as far as possible in their furs. All their faculties were numbed. Had the trail at this point not been unusually good, had they come upon some difficulty requiring thought and action, they would have sat there and frozen to death.

To Blythe came at length a realization of their danger. He had been sitting with his eyes closed,

half-dozing, when the sense of danger rushed over him, and roused him to make a desperate stand against the insidious cold.

"Here, fellows!" he shouted. "We 'll all freeze to death, if we keep on like this. We must n't go to sleep — we must exercise — do something to keep awake and warm up."

There was a muffled grumble from Raleigh. Billy, sunk in lethargy, did not answer.

"Slow up a bit. I 'm going to get out and run; and you two had better do the same."

Mechanically Raleigh slowed the car. Neither he nor Billy would budge from their seats, however.

Blythe sprang out. But when he tried to run, his feet slipped in the snow. He took hold of the back of the car, but felt his hands stiffening, and feared lest they should freeze in this position.

In a minute he clambered back into the car, his two companions taking not the slightest interest in his movements. He felt just a trifle warmer from his exertions; but to his repeated exhortations the others paid no heed.

Blythe felt that the situation was becoming desperate. The cold had done its work so insidiously that they did not even know their own danger. In some way they must be roused. There was no telling how many miles they were from any human habitation where they could warm up.

"I 'll rope's-end 'em and start a fight," the re-

porter said to himself. "That 'll liven 'em up. They may get so mad they 'll throw me out and go off and leave me, but I 'll have to risk that."

He rummaged among their stores on the back seat with him, for a piece of rope. The swinging end of that would sting them into action as nothing else at hand would. Blythe had not been a sailor for nothing — *he knew*.

He found the rope, and swung a couple of feet of it around, to get the feel and balance of it. Then drawing back his arm, he was just about to bring the rope down across Raleigh's shoulders in a hard cutting stroke, when he paused, with hand uplifted.

"No. I've a better plan than that," he muttered.

For half an hour he struggled silently with the rope, on the back seat, utterly unnoticed by his companions. At times he almost cried in helpless vexation at the way the rope eluded his numbed fingers. He knew exactly what he wanted to do; but it seemed as if his mind were trying to direct the fingers of a corpse.

Again and again the rope turned and twisted out of his hands, like a vicious living thing, while the motor-car rumbled along as if it were only running by its own momentum, and would presently sink into the universal cold inertness.

But a man's endeavors always succeed, if continued long and hard enough, and at last the knots were tied, the work done.

He leaned over and gave Raleigh a rousing thump on the back.

Angrily Raleigh turned around. "What did you do that for?" he demanded.

"Raleigh, we're going to freeze to death!" Blythe shouted. "Look at Billy — he's almost asleep now. Stop the car."

Raleigh obeyed, and Blythe, springing out, dragged the unwilling Billy to the ground.

"Le' me 'lone," Billy grumbled. "I was just getting comf'table."

Without a word, Blythe slipped his rope over Billy's head. It was a rough kind of harness.

"Now, start her up," Blythe commanded, jumping back into the car, and winding the other end of the rope around his own waist. "*Slowly* — not more than five miles an hour."

In this crisis he took command of the expedition, and without questioning his reasons — without any curiosity concerning them — Raleigh did as he was told.

Billy stood in the snow, dazed, until the car had moved away the length of the rope, when he was nearly jerked off his feet. Instinctively he began to run, and was soon wide awake, bouncing and floundering along behind the car, in his rope harness.

"Here! you funny guy!" he yelled angrily, "let me take this off."

But the car kept on, unmindful of his protests, and his own anger rose.

"Whatcher mean by this? I'll punch your head, Blythe, when I get to you."

His temper and the enforced exercise warmed him up very effectually, in a few minutes. Furiously he tried to tear the rope from around his shoulders; but with the *Phœnix Bird* tugging at the other end this was impossible.

In a paroxysm of rage, Billy sprinted after the car, to try to carry out his threat against Blythe's head; but the car still had the legs of him.

In five minutes Blythe saw that he was thoroughly restored to his normal condition, and told Raleigh to stop the car.

Jumping out, he was going to help Billy off with his harness; but the latter came at him with such blood in his eye, that Blythe deemed it the part of wisdom to put the car between himself and this unwilling beneficiary of his.

He tore around the car, and Billy after him. Round and round they went, Blythe's long legs keeping him out of danger, but the two still tied together by the rope. Finally Billy began hauling in on the rope, hand over hand, as he ran.

Blythe tried to disentangle himself from his end of the rope, and Merk jumped out and joined in the game, barking loudly, and trying to make out just what they were all up to.

The sight of the short-legged Billy and the long-legged Blythe in this intense merry-go-round, with

Merk frisking about their heels, now almost tripping up the one and then the other, was too much for Raleigh, and he howled with laughter — which only made Billy the madder. He wanted to lick both of them at once, and every time he came around Raleigh's side of the car, aimed a running punch at his chum in passing.

The comedy only came to an end when Billy was completely blown — and quite hot. Blythe himself felt no vestige of cold, and Raleigh was doubled over the wheel, weak with laughter.

"I say, Billy, I saved your life," protested the newspaper man in an injured tone.

Gradually, as his breath came back to him, Billy's usual grin returned to his face. He held out a hand to the man he had been so vigorously pursuing.

"I guess you're right, old man. You certainly have warmed me up pretty thoroughly."

With some suspicion, Blythe accepted the proffered hand.

"And now let's harness up Raleigh," Billy added, his eyes twinkling.

"I'm game — if it will make me as warm as you two."

And while the extreme cold lasted, all three of them found Blythe's device most useful in restoring their circulation by what its inventor called "involuntary exercise."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE LIGHT OF ASIA

FROM bleakest winter, the *Phœnix Bird* encountered a breath of summer in California, and its crew thawed out sufficiently to take an interest in the other contestants in the race. They should not have complained of the weather, however, for while the conditions had been arctic in severity the little car had managed to pass all their rivals, one after the other.

They arrived in San Francisco worn and weather-beaten, but a happy trio — or rather, a quartette; for though little has lately been said of Merk, he was an important part of the expedition, and as a foot-warmer alone was worth the trouble of bringing him along.

The day after their arrival, the *Liebig*, snorting like a leviathan, came hurtling into the city, and the next day the *Ischia* and the *Briquette* — all three in time to sail by the *Light of Asia* with the *Phœnix Bird*.

More than half the cars, by this time, had broken down, or turned back in disgust of the roads; the *Dixie* came racing up, just after the *Light of Asia*

had left her dock, and half a day behind it the *Gowfer's Goer* was plodding doggedly along.

For four days the Pacific Ocean well deserved its name. Its glassy surface was smooth and unruffled. The steamer was as steady as a Hudson River boat, and it was a positive joy for all the drivers — after the cramping confinement of the motor-cars — to romp about the deck, play games, or lie luxuriously outstretched in deck chairs and again revel in the pleasure of books and magazines.

Beside the contestants and the correspondents there were only a few Japanese merchants on board, who kept pretty much to themselves, jabbering their incomprehensible lingo, two missionaries and their families, and a dozen ordinary travelers, of whom a couple of Englishmen were forever getting up pools on the day's run.

Opposite Raleigh at table sat a little old French Canadian, very bald and bent, with a white flowing beard. He was quite feeble and wore smoked glasses. He took a keen interest in all the conversation that flew about among the various motorists. There was a lot of good-natured joshing as to what the big cars would do to the *Phœnix Bird*, when they once got on good roads.

"You hops along on your one leg pretty goot, ofer der rocks und tings of America," said Lauterwörter, "but shust vait! Ven ve comes to vat is a *r-road*, ve leaves you like you haf your vun leg cut off."

The old French Canadian turned timidly to Raleigh: —

"Eet is ze smalles' car you haf?" he asked. "Did zey mek you tek ze small one because you were not so beeg as ze uzzer drivers? Oh! zat is a shame!"

"Well, they have n't beaten us yet," Raleigh answered.

"And if there 'd been another boat sailing sooner, they would n't be up with us," Billy put in.

"Bravo! bravo! You beat zem yet," and the old man blinked cheerfully through his glasses.

When they went on deck after dinner, a lovely moon, nearly full, shone down from a cloudless sky upon the placid sea. Raleigh went forward, and stood in the prow, looking out over the gleaming ocean, wrapped in his own thoughts. What success or failure awaited them beyond this glistening expanse? And he was not thinking of the race.

Presently he heard the tap, tap, of a cane, and the little French Canadian joined him. For a time the latter leaned over the bulwark, beside Raleigh, without speaking.

"What must zis beauty be to a yong man!" he said at length in a hushed tone. "You haf a hard journey, but what triomph may arrive to you!"

"Yes, it is good to have something big to do," Raleigh assented.

The little old man nodded his head vigorously. "I also haf somezing beeg to do. I haf to seek some

one of whom you remind me much — my grandson, Armand. Heem I haf lost in ze beeg world." He heaved a long sigh.

"Is that why you are going to Japan?" Raleigh asked. He felt great sympathy for the old chap, without knowing how to express it.

"Yes. He was a lad like you, when he went away. He was ze only grandson, and ze only relative remnant to me. He goes to ze war in Afrique du Sud. Zere he is brav' — zey mek him sergeant. He like fighting — he go on to Japan to bat Russia. He is brav' again. He go in front — is mek prisonier — I hear no more of him. Now I tek ze money I haf save for my old age and I go search for him."

"I wish I could help you," said Raleigh, "but —"

"Yes, I know. You are generous, but you haf ze race — you cannot turn aside."

"It 's not that," Raleigh answered slowly. "I —"

Almost he confided to this kindly old fellow the real reason why he could think of nothing else than the quest he was on.

There was a pause. In the glorious, golden moonshine they stood, these two adventurers into the great continent of Asia, the young and strong, and the old and feeble. It seemed heartless that the strong should not offer to aid the weak.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHAT THE HEAVING SEA DISCLOSED

So occupied had every instant been during the arduous journey across the United States; so thoroughly had every faculty of Raleigh's been taxed; so many difficulties had to be met and overcome, that he had had no time or thought to give to a certain duty which now confronted him.

Blythe must be told the real object of their journey.

Raleigh had not dared to take him into his confidence at the outset, not knowing what kind of a man he was. But now he must be given the opportunity to withdraw from the hazardous enterprise, if he wished to.

From day to day Raleigh put off the telling. It was not the pleasantest task in the world. Blythe could quite justly reproach him for leaving him in the dark for so long. And a languorous contentment with his present ease disinclined the young fellow to any fresh exertion.

This mood lasted during the four days of good weather. Then came a change. A wind soughed through the rigging, and soon afterwards the placid bosom of the sea began to heave.

The merry company of the *Light of Asia* changed its complexion, when the steamer rolled and pitched. A few swaggered about, unduly proud of their sturdy stomachs; but the majority curdled up like milk in a thunderstorm, and sought remote places where they could remain in solitary misery.

Raleigh, though he had never been on the sea before, proved a splendid sailor. Himself without a qualm, he viewed poor Billy with alarm. The latter was simply prostrated, and moaned and groaned in his berth.

"Oh, Billy, is n't there anything you would like?" Raleigh asked.

"Yes," Billy feebly replied, "the earth. I 'd hate to be buried at sea."

He honestly believed he was seeing his last hour, and Raleigh flew for the ship's doctor.

"It 's only seasickness," the latter answered with cheerful indifference. "He will be all right in a few days."

As for Blythe, though he did not seclude himself, he paraded a lugubrious countenance to his little world, and shunned the dining-saloon. To any unusual rolling and pitching of the steamer he responded by increased pallor and uncertainty of feeling in his midriff.

"You would n't think I 'd been a sailor before the mast, to look at me, would you?" he asked whimsically. "Well, it was a long time ago, and I

remember I was desperately sick at first. But I *had* to get over it then. I was n't paid to be an invalid. Here the steamer provides an attentive steward and all the accessories — almost seems as if they wanted you to take advantage of them. You ought to try a rope's end or a belaying pin for the malady — the way my old captain used to. You 'd be surprised how efficacious they are."

As day after day passed, it seemed as if the sea would never become smooth again, as if the sun would never again shine, and as if the color of the sky were to remain permanently of a dark gray hue, making life hardly worth the living.

On the third miserable day, Raleigh came upon Blythe, curled up behind the smokestack.

"Feeling any better?" he asked.

The sufferer cocked a semi-humorous eye at him.

"If you think I don't look like the first daffodil of spring, you ought to take a peep at your Canadian friend. He looks as if they 'd tried to make a shredded wheat biscuit of him and had given up the job halfway. He 's just crawled up to the smoking-room. Go see if you can't cheer him up a bit."

Raleigh went forward to the smoking-room. In a few minutes he was back, his face pale, and his voice tremulous.

"Blythe, come down into our cabin," he said.

"What 's the matter, old man?" asked Blythe.

"It has come, has it, that nebulous feeling in your midst?"

He rose and followed Raleigh to their stateroom.

Billy greeted him with some cheerfulness. "Glad to see you chaps. I 'm feeling a trifle better — but this seasickness is surely a powerful thing."

"Friend Raleigh is just beginning to find that out," Blythe replied.

Raleigh disregarded the old man's chaff. Abruptly he said: —

"Blythe, there is something you were entitled to know at the start; but we could n't tell you till we knew you better."

By the seriousness of the tone, the man understood that it was no joking matter.

"Spit it out!" he cried.

"We 're not only racing to Paris — we're going to try to rescue a Russian princess, who 's a prisoner in Siberia."

Open-mouthed, Blythe regarded his friend at this succinct statement. There was no doubt that Raleigh was perfectly sane, and certainly he was in earnest. The man glanced at Billy. The latter, as matter-of-fact as his chum, threw in: —

"It 's her father who is paying our expenses."

The newspaper man fairly sputtered: "I say, you might have broken this to me more gently. You will finish what 's left of me. Now do you mind favor-

ing me with a few details of this preposterous affair?"

Briefly Raleigh related all the circumstances to the other, adding: "And the worst thing I'll tell you now. When I went into the smoking-room to see if I could do anything for that poor, little, old French Canadian who has been fathering me, I found him huddled in a corner, half-dead, his glasses on the floor, his head on his arm, and wobbling about as the ship rolled. He didn't hear me, and I was just about to speak to him when that long white beard of his *came off!*"

Billy sat up in bed with such vigor that his head gave a cruel bump to the upper berth.

"Yes, and he was talking to himself in *German*. 'Ach! du liver himmel!' he said, and a lot more I couldn't catch. But I recognized him. *He was Kotzalki!*"

"Did he see you?" Blythe asked, when he had caught his breath.

"No. You just bet I slipped out in a hurry."

"What a 'Sunday Special' this would make—and I can't use a word of it," the newspaper man exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXXV

BLYTHE'S SIGN LANGUAGE, IN JAPAN

For a minute an air of consternation pervaded the cabin. It was somewhat dissipated by the view taken by the correspondent: —

"You're really making this interesting for me," he said. "Here I enter an innocent little race, and believe the worst things ahead of me are cold and fatigue and hunger, and snow-blindness, and perhaps wolves or bandits or infuriated peasants, and now you run in an imprisoned princess on me and a Russian spy ready and eager to put us all out of business. You're doing yourselves proud. May I, as a plain man, and a seasick one at that, ask if there are any more complications?"

Raleigh shook his head. "No, that's the crop."

"Well, I am glad. Now can you go on holding hands with the resourceful Kotzalki for the rest of the voyage?"

"I guess so — though I'd rather punch his head for making me so sorry for him. How he could make himself look so small and weak beats me."

"It was the stoop of the shoulders, the tap-tapping cane, and the tremulous voice."

"At least, he won't be able to fool us again," Billy remarked.

"Remember, it's mighty important that he doesn't suspect that you suspect him," Blythe admonished.

Raleigh, however, saw little of the spy during the rest of the voyage. It continued rough until Japan was reached, and although Billy and Blythe gained their sea-legs, Kotzalki remained susceptible to the motion of the ship, and had no energy to continue to play his part of the pathetic old man in search of a grandson.

As soon as they landed he disappeared, and they were too busy trying to keep up with the other cars to give much thought to him.

In the run through Japan the *Phœnix Bird* was aided by circumstances which none of the motorists had reckoned on. As soon as the large towns were left behind, the roads dwindled in width to the needs of the local traffic. They became little more than bridle-paths, though their surface was generally excellent. This necessitated very careful driving on the part of the large cars. In the mountainous districts it became really perilous, especially at the turns in the road, round some of which their outer wheels had actually to be lifted.

In addition, the flimsy bridges, which sufficed for the primitive requirements of the Japanese, were not intended for heavy motor-cars. Even near the cities

they creaked and swayed, like wickerwork. Farther out in the country they became slimmer and more delicate still, and often had to be reinforced before the four-wheeled cars could trust themselves to them — even when stripped of all stores and superfluous parts.

Here the lighter weight of the *Phœnix Bird* counted to its great advantage. Although it had, naturally, been left behind at the outset, it caught up with the *Liebig*, and sped over a bridge which a small army of workmen were strengthening for that monster.

Next day it overtook the *Ischia* near the top of a mountain pass. The latter was drawn up at a tea-house awaiting the report of a scout sent forward to measure the width of the descent ahead.

There now only remained the *Briquette* in front of the *Phœnix Bird*.

"I wish we knew how far ahead of us she is," Billy said. "I had no idea you'd feel so queer when you could n't make a soul understand you."

It was Raleigh's and Billy's first experience in traveling through a country of whose language they were unable to speak a word. It gave them a unique feeling of helplessness.

Though Blythe did not know Japanese either, this dismayed him no whit.

"I'll ask," he volunteered.

"You! But how can you?"

"Just watch me make signs to them," he said loftily. "Fingers were made before words. When you open your mouth and pat your stomach, it means you want something to eat all the world over."

"Might n't it mean you were seasick?" Billy asked, with vivid recollections of recent experiences.

"Not on land, you gooney. Keep your eye on your uncle, and you 'll pick up the principles of sign language in short order. I 'll just tackle the next native we meet."

The chance to test his vaunted powers was soon afforded. A group of excited Japanese appeared. They scrambled to the side of the road, gesticulating and shouting.

"Stop the car!" Blythe commanded.

The natives immediately surrounded it, jabbering away like a troop of monkeys.

"Hey!" shouted Blythe, standing up, and stretching his arm out in an imperative gesture.

The Japanese stood hushed and awed.

Blythe pointed to the *Phœnix Bird*, and then in front of them. Then he held up one finger.

They nodded violently, while a torrent of utterly unintelligible remarks flowed from them.

"Hey!" shouted Blythe again, and again silence answered to the magic word.

He got out of the car, and walked busily up the road. They trooped behind him. Then he stopped,

and held up one finger — two fingers — three fingers, with a questioning lift of the eyebrows. They looked puzzled. He repeated it several times, until finally comprehension came to the face of one of the men, and grinning and bobbing his head, he pointed forward, and held up one finger.

"They say the *Briquette* is only one hour ahead of us," he announced calmly, as he climbed into the car again. "That means an hour of their walking, so it can't be far."

"Well, that was clever of you!" Billy cried, very much impressed.

"Oh, that's nothing. I can make any one understand simple things like that," Blythe replied condescendingly. "Ask me something harder."

Whether the natives and the lank American had managed to communicate their thoughts by means of signs, or whether it was only a coincidence, in a short time the car caught up with the *Briquette*, which was halted, as the *Liebig* had been, by one of those exasperatingly flimsy bridges which was just too weak to bear its weight.

Flushed with the elation of again being in the lead, Billy, who was at the wheel, put the *Phœnix Bird* full speed at the bridge, and the little car took it as a thoroughbred might a water-jump.

The bridge screamed its protest in every joint, but held; and the *Bird* flew up the opposite slope as if conscious that once more an opportunity was

offered of which it must make the most. A vivid stream of French objurgations followed in its wake.

"That was a near thing — that last bridge. They seem to get worse with every mile," Billy remarked. "If they keep on deteriorating, we shall have to begin patching them up ourselves."

Billy's prophecy proved all too true. Within two hours they came upon one whose appearance brought them to a halt. The three climbed out of the car to inspect it. Beneath their weight it swayed dizzily. Manifestly it would never, in its present condition, support the car.

"It will take more than the sign language to put that right," said Raleigh despondently.

"Oh! I don't know about that." Blythe had gone up on a little hill, and had seen the tops of some houses over the brow of the next rise. "I'll see if I can't get some Japs to do quick repair work on this bridge."

He strode away, leaving the others considerably encouraged by his discovery. In a short time he returned, with the tread of a conquering hero, some fifty natives at his heels.

He pointed to the gyrocar.

They regarded it with awe.

He sprang upon the bridge, and jumped up and down.

The creaks and tremblings were most ominous, but they did not impress his audience. Probably

they thought that was the way a bridge should act when one bounced about on it.

Next he went around below the bridge, seized one of the supports and shook it violently.

Then he produced a handful of silver, pointed alternately to the bridge, to the car, and jingled the money enticingly.

They looked at the coins in Blythe's hands and they looked at the bridge. With much jabbering they consulted together for a few minutes, then rushed off to their village and returned with axes and crowbars.

They pointed inquiringly at the bridge and at their tools.

"That 's the idea, my hearties," exclaimed Blythe; "now the quicker you set to work, the bigger bonus you 'll earn for extra speed."

As if they understood his words, they rushed at the bridge, with joyous whoops, and began hacking away at it.

"Hold on there — hey — not that!"

Blythe had to rush around like mad for a minute to save the bridge from complete demolishment. He finally managed to drive them off, and stood breathless, on guard like Horatius at the bridge, while the natives clustered together in a puzzled knot.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AN AMATEUR SUSPENSION BRIDGE

The situation would have been funny had it not been so serious. Sign language was failing them at a critical moment. Raleigh realized fully that, in order to stand the faintest chance in the final stages of the race, it was imperative to gain a long lead on their high-powered competitors while snow and narrow roads and perilous passes neutralized the value of this high power.

Once already chance had robbed them of the advantage they had gained. Now they must somehow manage to reach Vladivostock long before the others.

While the unfortunate Blythe was struggling with native stupidity, Raleigh's inventive brain had been busily trying to solve the difficulty along other lines. He hated to begin the bridge-strengthening process forced upon the other cars. It meant such a tremendous waste of time at every weakling bridge; and half a dozen of these might be encountered in a day.

The road made a sharp bend just at the bridge, and on the other side of the road stood a tree, in line with the bridge.

He called the hot and disgusted correspondent to him.

"I think we can get over without building up that bridge, if you can make signs to them to bring a long heavy rope."

"I don't believe I could make these fool Japs take a gold dollar if I held it out to them on a platter," Blythe answered. "But I'll try."

He took a small piece of rope, showed it to the eager natives, and stretched his arms wide, as one does to indicate great size to a child.

An intelligent light came into the faces of the Japs, and they trotted off toward their village.

"Come; that looks hopeful," Raleigh said.

"I guess I'll go along with them," Blythe answered gloomily. "I misdoubt me they will bring back a potato-masher instead."

In half an hour he returned in high spirits, the Japanese carrying a big coil of rope.

The two boys had not been idle during his absence, and the *Phœnix Bird* stood at the edge of the bridge denuded of its tires.

"Going to tie the rope to the car, so that if she goes through the bridge you can haul her out again?" Blythe asked.

The boys shook their heads. They tied one end of the rope firmly to the tree, and laid it from there across the bridge.

"Help us lift the *Bird* on to the rope."

When this was done, the rims of the wheels fitted loosely over the rope, and Raleigh's scheme began to dawn on the newspaper man.

"Now, get the Japs to take hold of the other end of the rope and pull as hard as they can, and we'll have a kind of amateur suspension bridge," Raleigh said with sparkling eyes.

"And the next car that comes along will have to invent its own way of getting over — hey?" Blythe exclaimed jubilantly.

It was not difficult to indicate to the villagers that they should grasp hold of the end of the rope and pull. A hundred willing hands stretched it so taut that a good share of the car's weight was taken from the bridge.

There was a whirring of the motor, a sudden leap forward, and the *Phœnix Bird* was halfway across the bridge.

It was lucky that Raleigh had made a quick start, for the natives evidently had formed no conception of what was about to happen. In frozen terror, for a few seconds, they mechanically clutched the rope. Then, as the car bore down upon them, like a devouring monster, they fled in all directions with piteous howls of fear.

CHAPTER XXXVII

OFF TO VLADIVOSTOCK

LUCKILY the car was safely over the bridge before the Japs loosed their hold of the rope.

The transformation was surprisingly complete. The three Americans could hardly believe that this scene of desertion had been so animated a few seconds before. While they were putting back the tires on the wheels, they discussed how they could pay their vanished helpers. "And," said Raleigh, "I want to buy that rope, too. There will be other bridges to use it on, and it ought to save us at least a half-day at each of them."

"We'd better fasten it to heavy stakes, or something," Billy reflected. "Next time they might let go when we were only halfway across."

The *Phœnix Bird* was ready to depart, and they were about to leave a little heap of coin by the roadside, hoping that it might reach the right persons, when Blythe exclaimed: —

"Hi! *there* is a sign of life."

The others looked, but saw nothing.

"He ducked as soon as I caught sight of him."

Presently the sleek head of the boldest of the villagers peeped forth from behind a rock.

"Here! take this, with my compliments."

Blythe tossed a copper, and the head vanished again, as if a bomb had been thrown at it; but when the copper did not explode, the brave fellow gradually oozed into view, irresistibly attracted by the coin.

Other heads shortly appeared, and when it became known that a distribution of wealth was going on, the place fairly teemed with them.

"If I were of a suspicious nature, I should say that there were more men around us receiving a reward than had pulled on that rope," murmured Blythe.

The mob became so dense and clamorous — even a bit threatening — that Raleigh deemed it advisable to let them listen to the music of the cut-out. At its hissing snorts a fresh access of terror seized upon the natives, and in a few seconds the land was deserted.

The rope, which Blythe had found no difficulty in buying, with sign-language and silver, formed a considerable addition to their load; but during the rest of the run through the wilder part of Japan it was of great service to them. Seven times did they utilize it to help bear them over weak bridges, and each of these meant a gain on their opponents.

In the highest spirits they trundled into Akita, and made eager inquiries about the next steamer to Vladivostock.

The Japanese are a notably polite people. They

hate to disappoint an anxious inquirer. They assured Raleigh, in their odd, half-swallowed English, that a steamer would very soon be ready to take him and his friends to Vladivostock. But one day passed, another came, and their manners only became more polite and deprecatory, while no steamer was yet ready to sail.

It is easy to imagine the impatient hours spent by our three travelers. They appealed to the American consul. He was a man who had passed some forty years in various parts of the East, and had come to have a thoroughly Oriental attitude of disbelief in the value of haste.

"Oh, there will be a steamer by and by," he assured them. "Better take it easy while you can."

On the afternoon of the third day the *Ischia* reached town.

Antonio Rusticano grinned when he saw the Americans.

"Vera kinda thingue — you waita for us. We waita for you also, sometime — Paris, maybe."

Swallowing his chagrin, Blythe asked after the other two cars.

"*Briquetta* — impetuous Frenchaman — no wait for workmen — go through bridga — now wait long time. Yes, vera sad!"

The Italian's eyes held an impudent twinkle as he pretended to weep at the news he was relating.

"And the *Liebig?*"

"German—too mucha weigh. Go through bridga, too. Now we two make race, Vladivostock to Paris. Whata you say—'best man winna.'"

Alas! there was small doubt who would be the best man over the good roads of Europe.

One satisfaction only the Americans now had: to watch the Italian crew grow hourly more wild with impatience to be gone, lest the other cars catch up with them. And just before the long-promised steamer was ready to sail, the *Briquette* appeared. Tizaine, her driver, was in the highest of spirits at his good fortune, not only in overtaking the leaders, but in shaking off at last the dangerous *Liebig*.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

RUSSIAN OFFICIALS

If the spy was still on their track, they were unable to discover him on the steamer *General Kuropatkin*, although Billy and Blythe spent some time sleuthing about, seeking to pierce possible disguises.

When they arrived at Vladivostock, they encountered such a fresh crop of troubles as to make them forget even the spy.

The officials of the Russian Government did not take an enlightened view of motor-racing, and refused to let them proceed. They looked upon the hardy drivers, whom the rest of the world had united to lionize, with open disfavor.

They asked why they wished to come here.

Tizaine explained that they were racing.

Well, if they wished to race, why did they not stay at home and do so? Was there not room enough in their own country? If not, why race at all?

Antonio Rusticano in vain tried to show them that it was to display the capabilities of motor-cars.

Why should any one try to do that in Asia? The country had gone on for centuries with little springless carts, drawn by little horses. Why, all at

once, should there be a need of these strange, self-propelled vehicles?

"We are opening up new fields," put in Blythe.

The officials scowled. "Opening up new fields!" The Czar's dominions were not fields to be "opened up"! There was something very disrespectful in the phrase. "Opened up"!—as if it were an oyster!

Did these foreigners think that they were better than their fathers, to invent things which *they* never thought of inventing? They sneered. The world was coming to a pretty pass, when men thought they had a right to invent whatever came into their heads.

"But this is a wonderful invention!" Tizaine cried, all aquiver.

Would the reign of the Little Father be more secure for this invention? On the contrary, inventions were pernicious things: like education and Socialism, they tended to unsettle men's minds.

Luckily those who had promoted this race had already reached more intelligent quarters in St. Petersburg, and one day there came a telegram across the wilds of Asia which entirely changed the attitude of the Vladivostock officials. It rendered them subservient friendliness itself. They forgot their objections. The contestants were assured that papers would shortly be forthcoming, which would make their passage through the Czar's dominion easy, though—with a shrug—the polite officials could not understand how any intelligent human

being could contemplate setting out at this time of year for such a journey, when there was the possibility of going by steamer or rail.

"At least," urged a benign old gentleman who had been the most stubbornly opposed of all before the arrival of the important telegram, — "at least wait for a few months until the summer sets in. It is mild to-day, but it will become cold again."

"What have we especially to fear at this time of year?" Raleigh asked.

"It has been an unusually hard winter. The wolves may eat you up. It would be disastrous to your enterprise."

"Yes, it would rather," Raleigh laughed. "What else is there?"

"There are bandits. Bands of them — very ferocious — infest the country. If you should come upon them — pouf!"

"And the roads?"

"Roads! Bah! There will come snow — and there will be no roads."

This last piece of information was most encouraging to the American. And for the rest, Raleigh had learned, early in this journey, that most men know the roads within five miles of their own doorsteps. Beyond this little horizon, they take delight in painting difficulties in most lurid colors.

Since arriving at Vladivostock, Blythe had been studying his maps at every spare moment. "Don't

catch me trusting to the directions of the intelligent native — especially when I can't understand what he says."

When at last they received their papers and fared forth from Vladivostock, they found that in one respect, at least, the old official had not misled them. They had plunged back into the depth of winter, after the comparative mildness of Japan and the ocean voyage. Luckily their way lay much through dense forests, which protected them somewhat from the cold.

They had started out with a guide; but his ignorance proved so appalling that they discarded him after the second day.

On the third it began to snow, and before the day was over, the *Ischia* and the *Briquette*, which had been leading, were completely stalled.

It was but a half-hour's job to put the *Phœnix Bird* back on runners.

"Now, old girl," said Billy, patting the car, "it 's your innings again."

Antonio Rusticano waved to them cheerfully, when they passed him.

"Gooda-bye!" he said. "I sita here now like — whata you say? — like a bum' on a log"; and the last thing they heard through the wintry air was his fine barytone voice raised up in the tuneful song, which he rendered, "In the gooda summertime."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE SENTINELS

After this there is little to tell for many days. It was plain, hard, uninteresting work.

They passed safely over the terrible "savannahs" of Manchuria — those bottomless morasses with their thin quaking crust of dried mud — frozen solid.

When they penetrated into Siberia the country became wilder and more lonely. The snow had been succeeded by a thaw, and that again by a heavy frost, and the result was a crust over which the gyrocar could proceed more swiftly than at any other time in the race. And for twenty hours out of the twenty-four did they stick to their seats. They would not have rested at all had not utter exhaustion forced them to.

At every village — and they became less and less frequent — rumors were rife about the ferocity and boldness of the wolves. The snow-crust was so strong that it enabled the natural prey of the wolves to escape them; and this had rendered them so desperate in their hunger that they even entered towns to attack men. But the crew of the gyrocar were too fagged by their continuous labors to pay any atten-

tion to these reports, especially since they had as yet not seen a single wolf.

Their discarded guide's place was well taken by extra supplies of gasolene and food. The everlasting grind continued, mile after mile, hour after hour, day after day, till it seemed to the weary trio as if it would never end.

Sometimes the country was open, and the fierce winds made the sight of the miserable villages where they were to spend their short hours of rest welcome — even with the execrable accommodations which they knew awaited them there. At other times, the country became more broken, and forests shut them in.

On the last day of February the cold snap gave no signs of changing to the premonitions of spring. The trail led through the wildest country they yet had seen in Asia.

Blythe, who had been sitting in a comatose condition for an hour, raised his head and sniffed about him.

"I should n't wonder if our old Russian friend knew a little what he was talking about, after all. This has a decidedly wolfy look to me. There is one comfort, though, the beast that gnaws my bones will feel that he's been buncoed. Now, Billy will be quite a tidbit. That reminds me of one time, on the Yukon — Hullo! Look at that!"

It was a wolf without doubt; but instead of giv-

ing any sign of attacking them, it put its tail between its legs, and fled away with melancholy howls.

"Merk! Come here!"

The collie had made a leap from the moving car, and had the wildest desire to pursue the flying wolf.

Raleigh laughed. "Merk seems able to put a wolf to flight easily enough."

The older man shook his head. "I know those animals well," he said. "That 's a pup without any sense. Just wait till his ma and pa get to discussing us. They 're likely to take a different view of the situation."

The other two were not much troubled by the supposition.

Before an hour had passed, however, they began to think that there was more in Blythe's words than they had suspected. On each hill they came to, they saw a solitary wolf, sitting motionless, and watching them intently. As they sped by, he would lift up his head and emit a long-drawn-out howl that went wailing out over the wilderness.

After the fourth sentinel, they fancied a change in the wolf's notes. There was a more hopeful tone, as if the wolves were saying that, although the queer contrivance itself did not look edible, it contained three fat furry specimens.

"Do you notice those wolves watching us now?" Blythe asked. "None of your pups! Gray-beards, every one of them. You can take it from me they 're

sizing us up for the good of the clan. I tell you a wolf's got more sense than many a man — and the appetite of an Esquimo."

Raleigh, without a word, put on all the speed that was possible on an unknown trail; but this manœuvre, instead of making for their safety, seemed to convince the watching wolves that the gyrocar was fleeing in fear, and short, imperious howls were passed from hill to hill, like the commands of a general assembling his army.

That this was, indeed, the case was made plain by answering howls from all quarters, rapidly converging on the trail in front.

"Lucky we're well armed," Billy muttered.

"Yes, if we can make them come at us one at a time, and in a straight line," Blythe said sarcastically. "If they happen to attack us a hundred at once, as they may be inconsiderate enough to do, well" — he shrugged his shoulders — "I'm sorry for the princess."

Presently he added: "Do you know how quick a wolf is? He's quicker than lightning — and that's quicker than a bullet. The Ishquod Indians in Alaska swear that a wolf can dodge the bullet from a rifle, if he sees it coming."

These were the last words spoken for some minutes. The howls of the sentinel wolves were answered by cheerful yelps. Dark gray forms could be seen slithering along on both sides of them at a speed

which made Blythe's claims as to their quickness seem not preposterous.

The trail here ran along a deep gorge, with the hills edging down closer and closer to it. A hurricane of the year before had uprooted many of the largest trees, and left them lying about in all positions. Luckily the trail had been cleared of them, or the gyrocar would have been caught like a rabbit in a trap.

As mile after mile passed, the three white-faced Americans could not understand why the wolves delayed attacking them. Two of them began to take a more hopeful view of the situation. Only Blythe continued to believe that all signs must be interpreted as sinister.

They discovered the reason for the immunity they had thus far enjoyed upon rounding a thick mass of spruces. A quarter of a mile in front of them rose a huge rock, overhanging the trail they had to follow, which here passed upon the very brink of the gorge. This rock was black with hundreds of wolves of the fiercest aspect, their tongues slavering, and their snarling lips drawn back from fangs which gleamed in the sunshine. "They're going to jump down on us as we pass," shrieked Billy.

"I told you they had sense," muttered Blythe, argumentative triumph in his tones, though his cheeks were blanched.

Instinctively Raleigh brought the car to a stop.

Suddenly he leaned forward, and turned on the power again.

"Be ready with your guns!" he cried. "We've got one chance in a thousand."

CHAPTER XL

A BATTLE ROYAL

THERE was that in Raleigh's voice which gave courage to his companions, though they could see no possible way of escape. Their weapons in their hands, grimly they waited for the wolves to come within so short a range that the bullets could not fail to find their mark.

Raleigh drove the gyrocar forward into what seemed certain destruction. Yet, strangely enough, he did not put on all speed, to dash past the rock. Rather he was feeling his way carefully, in his eyes a light of desperate hope.

Within twenty-five feet of the rock where the wolves were massed, a monster pine tree — straight and branchless — had been blown down by the hurricane, and had fallen diagonally across the gorge. One of its tremendous uptorn roots formed an inclined plane to the smooth trunk, with not too sharp an angle at the juncture of the root.

At the moment when the wolves were already crouching to spring, Raleigh made a sharp turn to the left and drove the gyrocar up the root of the pine tree.

It was a madman's act. There was a convulsive twist of the steering-runner, as the trunk itself was reached, and a second later a grinding jar as the brakes were put on hard.

It all happened so quickly that some of the wolves — timing their jump for the car as it should pass beneath them — sprang from the rock. Then there arose a mob-howl of bestial rage from the mass of the brutes, and, like a swarm of bees brushed from a tree, they dropped from the rock and made for the gyrocar.

His hair bristling on his neck, Merk was about to rush out on the tree to hold it against the horde of enemies.

"Keep back, Merk!" Blythe shouted, grabbing the dog. Then to the wolves, "One at a time, please!" he called out politely, as if directing a crowd of sight-seers, — and one at a time it had to be; for on the tree trunk there was not room for the wolves to attack them except single file, nor was there room for them to dodge the bullets from the magazine rifles.

Rage and hunger prompted them to come on as fast as they could crowd up on the pine. But the tremendous power of the guns — which could pierce twenty-two inches of solid oak — bored through the wolves, from end to end, a trunkful at a time. In their death agonies, each wolf fastened his fangs in the rump of the wolf ahead of him, and like huge

BEATING OFF THE WOLVES

strings of sausages they rolled into the gorge below.

One gun could easily attend to all their enemies who could approach along the tree trunk; so Blythe and Raleigh began to direct their fire into the clustered gray mass on the bank. So crowded together were the animals, and so much interested in the attempt of their champions to force the passage of the tree trunk, that each bullet would slay from two to seven.

It took a half-hour of slaughter for the ferocious beasts to realize that not only had their prey escaped them, but that they themselves were in danger of annihilation. A short period of hesitancy followed, and then the howl of defeat and retreat was sounded by those of the leaders who remained alive.

In a second every living wolf was in full flight, tail between legs, and the fear of instant death sending him scudding away like a wraith before a hurricane. They did not even stop to eat their dead comrades, as is their custom.

The gyrocar, with its passengers, spent the night on the trunk of the pine tree which had saved their lives. The battle occurred toward the end of the afternoon, and the sun had set soon afterwards. Usually they continued their journey for hours after nightfall, the light of their lamps on the snow making the path almost as light as day. But to-night they very soon realized that getting the gyrocar

safely off the tree trunk was a job of unusual difficulty. Raleigh had driven the car up on it, under the impulse of the intensest emotion. Backing off it, in cold blood, was far harder.

During the night, it was necessary to start up the motor, from time to time, to keep the gyroscope, on which depended their equilibrium, in motion. That there was no danger of their falling asleep and forgetting all about it, they learned soon after nightfall. They had hardly composed themselves for sleeping when Merk began to growl, and from the vague darkness they heard the sound of some animal snuffing about, followed by the crunching of bones. Although it was the dead wolves that were the attraction, the men themselves had recently been too near such a fate not to shudder as they listened. Later, when the moon rose, they could make out the forms of a number of immense polar bears, feasting on the carcasses. After that it seemed as if specimens of every carnivorous animal known to these cold regions came to the feast.

"This thing is getting on my nerves," Blythe exclaimed, when the crunching of bones and the greedy snorts of the feeders seemed to fill the air. He took his gun, and for the next hour peppered the various indistinct forms in the moonlight. He could not tell how much damage he did; but in the morning there were no living animals to be seen. All not killed by Blythe had either eaten their fill and gone away,

or had withdrawn before the deadly spitting of the rifle.

They now set to work to escape from their haven of refuge. After three hours of useless toil, Raleigh stopped the motor.

"There's only one way we can manage this, and that is to pile up enough wolves in the angle of the root here to give us a solid embankment to drive over."

CHAPTER XLI

AN UNEXPECTED CHECK

LABORIOUSLY they began to carry the dead wolves to the angle of the tree and the root. Merk watched them, his bright eyes very wide open, and his tail held very high. When he discovered what they were doing, he pounced upon the carcass of an immense bear, and with violent jerks tried to bring it up to the tree.

The bear had frozen fast in the snow, and at first Merk could not budge him, although he nearly became frantic with rage when he saw how obstinately the bear resisted him.

At length he managed to loosen him from the hollow in which he lay embedded; and with triumphant growling he began tugging him inch by inch over the snow. Now and then his feet would slip out from under him, and he would ignominiously sit down; or the bear's fur would give way and he would topple backwards head over heels.

Again and again it seemed as if he could not budge the bear another inch, but he never gave up.

The men laughed till they could not stand up. Once Blythe was going to help Merk with his bur-

den, but the pride of the collie resented this with such fierceness that the man was absolutely afraid to lay a hand on the dead bear.

When Merk finally managed to deposit his immense contribution to the pile, he stood, stiff with pride, and barked in turn at each of his friends, as much as to say: —

"You bring measly little wolves, but *I* bring polar bears."

Raleigh grabbed him up in his arms and gave him a hug.

"Now, that will do for bears, old chap. Just bring us up some of these wolves," pointing to them. And Merk was quite content to obey his master.

All four worked hard until they built up a solid rampart. Then Raleigh took his place at the wheel again, the motor was started, and the deeply ridged driving-wheel began slowly to revolve backward. Down over the slippery bodies of the wolves the gyro-car crunched its way to the trail.

Blythe mopped his forehead, damp in spite of the cold.

"That was a lively little adventure. I feel ready now for bandits, secret police, or anything else this blessed country affords."

But the newspaper man had invoked forces whose strength he had not gauged. On this day the winter broke, and a thaw set in. At first the mildness of the weather was pleasant, but when the crust began

to soften, and then little rivulets to tinkle through the forest, the outlook was not propitious.

For the rest of the day they managed to use the runners on the *Bird*, but when next morning they tried to set out on their journey, the roads were found to be impassable. The snow no longer offered any support: runner or wheel sank through its mushy consistency into the oozy bottomless mud beneath.

For three days they were kept in the miserable village where they had stopped for the night, while winter melted — most literally — into spring.

The enforced rest, at first, was welcome — especially coupled with the knowledge that the *Ischia* and the *Briquette* were making no more progress than themselves. After they had slept and rested their fill, after the car had been thoroughly overhauled, after they had splashed around the village till they knew every stick and stone in it, there was absolutely nothing to do. Then the forced inaction began to fret them. Of all forms of boredom none has ever been invented to equal a sojourn in a Siberian village.

The wind sprang up on the second day, and its ceaseless moaning and soughing put their nerves quite on edge. But if it was trying, it at least dried up the moisture fast. On the morning of the fourth day they were able to set out again — slowly and on the low gear.

On this day they covered fourteen miles, after fourteen hours of hard work.

During the next few days, under sun and wind, the road improved noticeably. They now had to leave their direct route and bear off to the north, in order to reach the village of Irkiwatz, where the princess was. The excitement of the beginning of the most hazardous part of their journey made them oblivious of the fatigue and tedium of these days.

Irkiwatz no longer seemed so immeasurably distant as at times it had. On Blythe's map they found themselves crawling nearer to it.

The character of the country gradually changed. It grew ever drearier and more desolate — ever flatter and less wooded. Even the trees were stunted, as if discouraged at the sterility of the ground.

"My goodness! What a country this would be for a man not to own," Blythe exclaimed, with a heartfelt sigh. "If I should inherit a principality of this sort of thing, I would travel incognito the rest of my life. Yet I suppose if some fool nation tried to steal this, Russia would fight for it."

Udritilz, three days from the climax of their journey, was almost a town. Here, as usual, the chief of police called upon them to inspect their papers.

They had got used to these visits, to the sharp questioning of the officials, their suspicious glances and their final permission to proceed. The papers they were provided with usually changed the

haughty representatives of the Czar into affable individuals.

Now the chief looked at their papers. As he read on, he pursed up his lips; then he frowned. He turned back to the beginning, and frowned yet more deeply. He withdrew into the embrasure of the window and examined the papers more minutely.

The Americans watched him with apprehension. The nearer they got to Irkiwatz the more nervous they became.

The official finally turned upon them, and surveyed them with a Napoleonic attitude of displeasure.

"One, two, three," he said, pointing at each in turn. "Where — four?"

"Four was the guide," Raleigh answered politely. "We had one in the beginning, but he was n't much good, so we gave him up."

"We can't afford to carry any dead weight, you know," Blythe explained.

"Dead weight?" the chief cried, glaring at them. "Where dead weight? Who?"

It took fifteen minutes' strenuous explaining to satisfy the official on this point.

"Perhaps you have not kill anybody," he finally admitted grudgingly. "But this matter of guide — serious!"

Sternly he folded up their papers, and put them in his breast-pocket.

"I will consider case, more long," he announced finally, "and to you tell decision in morning. Maybe I communicate to Government, St. Petersburg."

He was leaving the room, when Raleigh stopped him.

"If you have to communicate with St. Petersburg, how long would it take you?"

The official glared at him for this inquiry. Majestically he replied: —

"I tell cannot. Depends on volume of correspondence."

"Correspondence!" Raleigh gasped. "Why, sir, we are in a race, and we want to be gone from here early in the morning. A correspondence would make us lose."

"I have no race," the official replied loftily. "In morning I to you my decision announce."

CHAPTER XLII

A HUMAN JELLYFISH

WHEN the official had gone the three looked blankly at one another.

"What do you suppose put him up to this dodge?" Raleigh asked.

"You can search me," Blythe answered. "The only things to count on in this country are new and unusual forms of stupidity."

Their surmises and conjectures led to no conclusions, and finally they philosophically decided that they might as well enjoy a good night's sleep, in their hotel, whose approximation to cleanliness was rare in Siberia.

Judging that the chief of police would not get through with his meditations on their case at an early hour, they gave themselves the luxury of turning over in bed for an extra doze, the next morning. Few of us can appreciate what this meant to the three worn travelers.

They had a leisurely though a somewhat anxious breakfast. Then they went out and overhauled the car.

As the hours went by and still no chief appeared,

they grew more and more troubled, with the burden of their secret upon them.

Just as they were finishing luncheon, he came, accompanied by a very odd-looking man. In shape he was a little ball of a head set upon a big ball of a body, with arms and legs attached. His stolid face and half-closed pig eyes betrayed no ray of intelligence, if he possessed any. There was not a spear of hair on his face, not even in his eyebrows. If he had any on the top of his head, it was invisible by reason of a dirty nightcap pulled down over his ears.

"A Mongol mongrel, if there ever was one," Blythe thought.

The chief addressed them gravely.

"I given your case consideration, and I decided me to permit procedure of car, spite your conduct irregular — very irregular!"

The three meekly listened to his words, too much relieved at the main tenor of them, to care whether he indulged in a homily on proper conduct or not.

"I also you provide with guide, not to have trouble similar in coming time."

Had the chief not been so intent on his own speechifying, he could hardly have helped noticing the dismayed air which came over his hearers.

"I 'm sure, it 's very good of you," stammered Raleigh, when the chief paused. "But could n't we

dispense with a guide, don't you think? You see our car is n't very large."

"It should have larger been made then," the chief replied rebukingly. "Your papers describe persons four. Grave infraction is to the laws to thus only three be."

They had not another word to say for themselves, but guiltily hung their heads.

The chief continued: "I you supply with 'complish guide. Knows English — three, four words. 'Complish man. You have no more trouble with police. Now — one, two, three, four — like papers."

The chief was benignly beaming on them.

Raleigh felt that their reception of his kindness was not what it should have been.

"Does he know the roads well?" he asked, trying to infuse a hearty ring to his voice.

The chief shrugged his shoulders.

"Many roads — one guide," he replied. "But papers now correct — no more trouble — count one, two, three, four — all there."

They had to submit, and went out to the *Phœnix Bird.*

Merk, guarding it, sprang to his feet and growled at the approach of the guide.

"It's all right, Merk, old boy," said Blythe, with mock cheerfulness. "He's our guardian angel. He'll crowd you a bit, but you must n't bite him or he

might leave us, and that would disturb the arithmetic of the police department."

Billy took the dog between his knees on the front seat, beside Blythe, who was driving. For some time past he had been learning how to run the car. "You never can tell what may happen," he had argued; "and besides, it will be a good thing if I can spell you two from time to time."

The guide took his place by Raleigh on the back seat, crossed his hands on his fat paunch, shut his eyes sleepily, and seemed to think that he had performed his full duty.

"I guess we might as well find out what his three-four words of English are," Raleigh said.

Turning to the guide, he asked:—

"Do you understand English?"

The guide opened his eyes, and blinked at his interlocutor, without answering.

"Speak English?" Raleigh asked again.

There was the concentrated essence of emptiness on the face of the guide.

"He'd be a hard man to interview," the newspaper man remarked. "Try him again with words of one syllable."

"Where — go?" Raleigh shouted.

This time the guide's face betokened some comprehension. In thick guttural tones he said, pointing straight ahead:—

"Go!"

Having thus exerted himself, he shut his eyes and relapsed into his former comatose state.

"Come! that 's fine, as far as it goes," Raleigh commented. "I 'll develop you into a conversationalist yet."

He prodded the fat man in the side.

"Know this country?"

The Mongol opened his eyes, and with surprising suddenness said: "Dollar!"

"That 's two of his words," Billy put in.

"I would n't hurry him too much with the other two," Blythe flung over his shoulder. "It might injure him. Besides, you want to leave us something to look forward to."

"One thing seems to be certain, though," Raleigh remarked, "we can talk in front of our friend here without much danger of being understood."

"The question now before the house is, how to get rid of this human jellyfish — this paunch masquerading as a man — this 'go-dollar' specimen," Blythe said.

"For he must go," Raleigh assented, "even if every chief in Siberia frowns upon us in consequence."

"Anyway, there 'll be four of us without him, in a few days, if all goes well," Billy added.

They trundled on through the desolate countryside, all their wits occupied with the problem of getting rid of their incumbrance, while the object of all this thought was placidly wrapped in sleep.

Raleigh studied the features of the unwelcome one intently.

"It seems to me," he announced at last, "that if we should simply deposit him gently on some barren spot by the roadside, he would fall asleep and stay there."

"Yes, he would take root, if one watered him a bit," Blythe assented.

There was a pause filled with anxious thought for all three; for though they might joke about their incubus, that he was no joking matter they fully recognized. In three days they hoped to reach the village which held Princess Tassa. No matter how stupid this passenger of theirs, it was unlikely that he would sleepily watch them carry off a political prisoner. Moreover, they needed his place.

The thought of bribing him naturally occurred to them. His second word, "dollar," was probably the keynote of his character. But they could have no assurance that having accepted their bribe he would not betray them to the police for further reward.

Thus a day and a half passed, with this incubus weighing on them. Even as a guide he was absolutely worthless. At several places where the road forked and a decision had to be made, although Blythe was tolerably certain which the right road was, he tried to obtain some expression of opinion from the lump of flesh they were carting along.

The latter, when roused from his somnolence, blinked stupidly at the two roads, and murmured:

"Go!"

"Yes, but which — which road?"

"Go!" he repeated amiably.

"Go there?" Raleigh pointed to one road. "Or go there?" he pointed to the other.

The guide nodded pleasantly.

"Go!" he mumbled the liquid monosyllable, and folding his hands more comfortably across his stomach, gave himself to sleep again.

Thoroughly exasperated, Blythe pulled the nightcap from the Celestial's head.

"I say!" he yelled, "you may wear a nightcap all the time, but you've got to wake up now and then if you travel with us. Tell us which road — there or *there?*"

Unwinking, and without anger, the fat man gazed at him.

"Dollar!" he gurgled.

"Perhaps he wants to be paid every time he shows us the way," suggested Billy. "Let's try him, anyway."

Raleigh held out a silver coin.

Slowly and without eagerness the Asiatic took it, and put it into his ear.

"Go!" he mumbled, his head drooping forward on his breast.

"Sleeps as well without a nightcap as with it," Billy remarked.

"Well, I'll put it back on his beautiful head,"

THE GYROCAR AND ITS SKI ATTACHMENT

Blythe said. "The blessed babe might catch cold if I did n't."

"Hold on a minute!"

"Raleigh's tone and strangely intent look attracted the attention of the others.

"What 's the matter?" Blythe asked.

Raleigh did not answer at once, but continued to stare as if fascinated by the sleeping man.

"I say, what is it?" Billy insisted.

Warningly, Raleigh laid his fingers on his lips, and with a manifest effort at catching up the tone in which they had formerly been speaking, he said:

"Let 's stop for luncheon, and have our chef here get us a bang-up meal. I 'm sick of cold corned beef and crackers eaten en route. Blythe, you 've got to cook us something. You have boasted what a cook you were."

Again he gave a meaning glance to the other two as he spoke, and they grasped the fact that he wished for an opportunity to speak with them alone.

CHAPTER XLIII

REVELATIONS

THE car stopped. Raleigh awkwardly fell over against the Celestial. The latter roused himself and resumed his duties.

"Go!" he mumbled.

"Yes, we'll go, old chap, as soon as we've had a feed," Raleigh replied indulgently. "If you get out and hustle around for some twigs, it will expedite matters."

The suggestion fell on deaf ears. A gentle snore came from the guide's nose, and his huge breast rose and fell rhythmically.

"Let him slumber, poor overworked lamb," Raleigh continued. "Now, let's scatter and get some twigs for a fire."

As soon as they were out of earshot of the guide his whole manner changed.

"Blythe, when you pulled his cap off did you notice anything in particular?" he asked.

The correspondent shook his head.

Raleigh went on excitedly: "When you pulled it off, something about the shape of his head struck me as familiar. Then his hair — did n't either of you

notice it? It was half an inch long, and very even — as if the top of his head had been shaved not long ago. It's just about had time to grow so much since we left the *Light of Asia*. He's shaved off his eyebrows, this time, and clipped his lashes close, and that big stomach is n't his any more than the bushy white beard was. I fell over against it on purpose when the car stopped. Now do you understand? The guide who can only speak four words of English — is Kotzalki."

"Whew!" Blythe gave a long surprised whistle. "That's why the chief of police forced him on us."

"And I said on the *Light of Asia* that he would never be able to fool us again," said Billy despondently.

"We have been talking as freely before him as if he were in the plot," Raleigh added.

"He *is* in the plot," Blythe assented gloomily, "you can bet your bottom dollar on that. And we've got to keep it up, or he'll begin to suspect something. Let's hurry up with the twigs."

An unnatural gayety prevailed during the meal which Blythe prepared. In his varied career he had picked up a fair knowledge of outdoor cooking. What he now concocted would have been a welcome change had they had any thoughts to spare for their food.

They set off again, and gradually fell into silence, each of them racking his brains for some way of

getting rid of their guide before reaching Irkiwatz. As for the spy, nothing could be divined of his thoughts from his stolid exterior. Whatever his moral qualifications, he was certainly a consummate actor. Never for a second did he appear anything except the doltish native guide.

That night they again managed to get off together for a short consultation.

"A bullet in the back, and a shallow grave is all I can think of," Blythe said grimly.

Raleigh shook his head, his face set and white.

"Blythe, I can't stand for it. I don't see any other way, but — to commit murder!" His voice was full of horror at the idea.

"He would not hesitate to kill us — or that poor girl," Blythe argued.

"I know it — but what would my mother say, if I came home a — "

"What would she say if you didn't come home at all?" Blythe interrupted. All humor had gone from Blythe. "Of course this expedition is yours. I'm only the tail to the kite; but I'm older than you two put together, and I feel responsible for you. If it's a question of his life or yours — "

One loses the conventional code of morals, as one does of manners, under the stress of primal conditions — and this was as truly primal as if this latest type of automobile were only a raft in mid-ocean, with starving men clinging to it.

CHAPTER XLIV

IN KOTZALKI'S EVIL MIND.

And what were the thoughts of the spy, sitting heavily on the rear seat, listening to every word spoken by the three Americans, and emitting from time to time an innocent snore?

Kotzalki had boundless ambitions of his own, and took no heed of the rights and lives of others. Power was what he wanted, power to wring the hearts and purses of men and of women; power to make people cringe before him — fawn upon him, though they might hate him with the deepest, bitterest hatred.

He cared nothing for men's hatred. It was but a fillip to his vanity.

He had not received promotion as fast as he considered his due. Immediately over him were those, he felt, who were jealous of his abilities. They kept him down, and prevented his merits from being recognized.

But let his present undertaking be carried through to a successful end and they would no longer be able to keep him from the attention of the all-powerful Head of the Secret Police.

Papers he carried enabled him to enlist the co-

operation of the officials in Siberia, but so far no one was aware of the plot which he had unearthed, and which he alone was seeing to its end. It would come like a bombshell to some very self-important personages for him, single-handed, to discover three Americans in the act of helping a political prisoner escape from Siberia.

He knew that the old friendship between Russia and the United States, dating from the time of the Revolution, had been gradually waning, as America advanced in the van of civilization, while Russia opposed her huge bulk to all progress, and stamped out the few flames of liberty which sporadically sprang up in her domain.

The bureaucracy — the true ruling power of Russia — had come to look with more and more hostility at the land which fostered everything it would fain smother off the face of the earth. Hence Kotzalki surmised that it would give the bureaucracy no small pleasure to arrest some of America's meddlesome sons in the attempt to rescue a political prisoner — an unlawful act which even the United States would have officially to disown and to apologize for, much as the apologizing officials might secretly sympathize with the attempt.

The astute spy's thoughts were of the rosiest. Within him there welled up exultant triumph. He would prove his value, and his rise would be proportionally rapid. His hour was at hand.

Of the utter desolation of the girl and her father, of the misery he would bring on these three Americans, and upon their friends and relatives, he cared no whit. He was callous to human suffering.

"Let me once catch them — as they say, 'with the goods on them.'"

CHAPTER XLV

STILL IN PERPLEXITY

More grim became their thoughts as more grim became the scenery. The spy stood between them and the freeing of the girl, as he had stood between other poor politicals and their freedom. They had not sought a contest with him — gladly, indeed, would they have avoided it; but he had persisted. In the beginning when he had obtained an inkling of their undertaking he had tried to disable their car, through the instrumentality of Sam Peavy. When that failed, he had followed them across a broad continent and a broad sea — and now it had become a life-and-death struggle between them.

But even yet they could not, as Blythe had suggested, calmly put a bullet into his head and throw him to the wolves. Too many years of Christian ancestry lay behind them for that.

Ever drearier and wilder grew the country as they proceeded northward. They saw a few peasants, creatures who shambled to the doors of their huts, more like animals coming to the entrances of their dens than like human beings. Unkempt, stolid, too low in the scale of human development even to feel

curiosity : staring stupidly at the strange apparition which flew past them — no more astonished than if it had four wheels — no less than if it had soared through the air.

What must life be to a refined and educated young girl condemned to live in such surroundings ?

Only a few miles now lay between the gyrocar and her whom it had come so far to rescue. And still the Americans had arrived at no resolution how to act.

It was the son of the blacksmith who finally hit upon a solution of their difficulty. For hours he had been turning over a misty idea in his head, suggested by a half-remembered scrap of casual reading. Raleigh was driving, and driving as slowly as he dared, without danger of awakening the suspicions of the spy.

At noon they stopped again for luncheon, to kill more time. From his seat in the car, Kotzalki watched them through nearly closed lids. He found great amusement in their gloomy countenances. That they would not give up their quest he did not doubt. That they would presently try to get rid of him he felt assured. He had little fear that they would harm him, reposing in the certainty that he had duped them and that they did not know who he was, and only regarded him as a superfluous, stupid guide.

He had been wondering why they had not at-

tempted to get rid of him before. He knew his presence disarranged their plans woefully, and that his place was wanted for a fairer passenger. He concluded that now they would not do anything until they reached Irkiwatz itself. There they would simply leave him. They would arrive after nightfall with one guide, and go away before daybreak with another. It was not a bad scheme, if he had been what they supposed him to be.

To himself he laughed silently at the picture of their consternation, when — just as they were about to depart — he would appear, and, with a low, ironical bow to the disguised lady, would say: —

"I regret, Princess Tassa, to interrupt this little journey of yours. I arrest you all in the name of the Czar."

Of course he would have the police forewarned that he might need their help. He was going to take no chances; but nothing could fail now.

In spite of himself he chuckled. They were already in the hollow of his hand.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE SURPRISE OF KOTZALKI

WHILE Kotzalki gloated over their coming discomfiture, Billy was speaking to his friends, putting into words the misty idea that had come to him as an inspiration.

"Don't the Siberian exiles have a sort of government of their own," he asked, "to judge and punish their own members, irrespective of the regular government?"

"Yes."

"Then would n't it be possible to hand over Kotzalki secretly to them. He has harmed *them* most. They should have the right to try him."

Blythe gripped his arm.

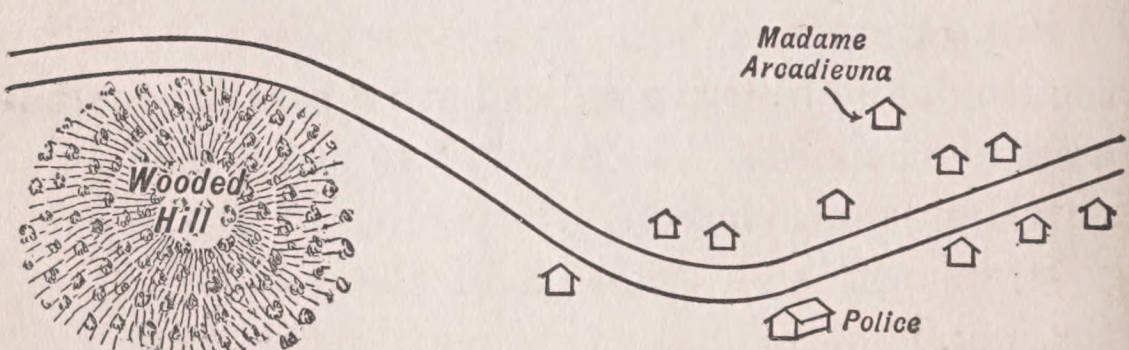
"By heavens! man, you have hit it — if it can only be done. And there is justice in it, too. I don't say the end will be different for him, — but even civilized society protects itself against its evil-doers, — and Kotzalki is despicable in character and profession, and has sent to death, or worse, many a noble man and woman. Raleigh, let me take another look at that sketch of the village."

Prince Anastasief had given Raleigh a rough plan

of the village of Irkiwatz, so that he could find the house where his daughter lived without having to ask any questions. It was very simple: Irkiwatz required no map-maker to chart it.

Blythe studied it as if he did not already know it by heart.

"There's no possibility of our making a mistake in finding Madame Arcadievna's house," he observed. He pointed to the sketch. "That wooded hill I



should judge to be about half a mile east of the village — just the right place and distance for us to stop in."

He drew a long breath.

"Well, for good or for ill, the game will be called pretty soon — and no rain-checks issued."

Blythe drove the car all the afternoon. It was an excuse for not going fast. From his maps he knew how far they were from Irkiwatz, and with Billy at his side as mentor, he managed to time the drive so that just as the day was coming to a close they

reached the wooded hill shown on Prince Anastasief's sketch.

A wood-road dived into the forest, and without a word of explanation Blythe turned into it.

The fat guide uttered no protest. Sleepily he opened an eye, and shut it again. He did not even demur when the car left the wood-road, and plunged in among the underbrush. It was all coming out according to his calculations. Probably they would hand him some money and dismiss him here.

But he opened both eyes wide when he felt a small cold object pressed against his temple, while a cool voice said: —

"Hands up, please."

It was Raleigh's voice, and the cold object was the muzzle of an automatic pistol. The spy's short hair would assuredly have stood straight up if his nightcap had not held it down, as he thought how easily an automatic pistol can go off, if the finger on its trigger trembles.

Yet even now he did not betray himself. They were taking more strenuous means of getting rid of him than he had anticipated.

"I go! I go! Goo-bye! Not guide you more. No. Get other mans."

He spoke with every manifestation of terror, like an ignorant guide giving up his job.

"A marvelous growth in his knowledge of English," commented Blythe sarcastically.

Suddenly he whirled and plunged both hands into the spy's huge stomach.

"Put a *leetle* more pressure on your trigger, Raleigh, — and if he flutters an eyelid — shoot!"

But the spy sat like a graven image, not even breathing, the fear of instant death making his face so pale that it gleamed in the dim light.

"Now, Billy, you take his guns from him — I have hold of his wrists," Blythe ordered.

Underneath the guide's rough clothing Billy unearthed two large calibre revolvers, buried in the pillow which gave him his girth. The fingers of the spy's right hand just touched the butt of one, but had not quite reached the trigger, when the newspaper man had pounced upon him.

"That's an old Chicago trick," Blythe went on, breathing a trifle hard. "I shot a hold-up man myself, once, through my overcoat, when I was on the *Tribune*."

"Too much rough. I go. Dollar!" mumbled the spy, playing his part to the last.

Raleigh answered him politely.

"No, you don't go, Mr. Kotzalki. We have need of your presence."

In spite of his years of training in danger and disguises, the spy gave a start. Not once had it occurred to him that he might be known. The revelation was such an unexpected shock that it robbed him absolutely of his self-control.

In a blind panic of terror, and regardless of the pistol at his head, he jumped from the car and fled for his life.

Raleigh did not shoot him even then. Somehow, he could not bring himself to fire upon a defenseless man, though that man might be the venomous Kotzalki.

The three Americans sprang after the squat figure that was making off at such a marvelous rate of speed.

Merk leaped with the others, barking furiously.

Billy made a dash for the collie, and threw both arms around him. He knew how quickly a barking dog will attract attention — an attention that would be fatal to them just then.

"Quiet, sir!" he commanded.

The collie whined and entreatingly licked his hand, but Billy repeated sternly, "Be silent, Merk! Go back to the car, and *guard it*, sir!"

Merk, like a brave soldier, who has been ordered to lay by his arms, and keep off the field of battle, just as the bugle blows the charge, looked longingly after the chase, once again up at Billy, then, with drooping head, slowly went back to the car.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR

Down the wood-road they tore, Raleigh so close behind the spy that his outstretched fingers could almost touch him. But the fear of death was sending Kotzalki along as he had never run in his life.

Faster and faster they went, the ground seeming to fly from under their feet. Blythe, with his long legs, was pounding along just behind, but he could not gain on the fugitive either.

Dimly already the open country showed through the trees. Raleigh knew that if the spy once reached the main road he would probably escape. A stray villager upon it and all was lost.

In desperation he risked everything on one move. Straight out through the air he dived for Kotzalki's knees. He had played half-back on the high-school team, but never had he tried a tackle on which depended such results.

He felt his arms close around the spy's knees, and the two went rolling over and over on the ground, Kotzalki kicking and biting like a wild-cat. Luckily he had no breath for yelling at first, and when he did resort to that final means of defense, Blythe

promptly choked off his wind, so that he lay limp and motionless, all the fight gone out of him.

Billy came up, and was sent back to the car for some rope; and Kotzalki was soon wound around like a cocoon, with a gag in his mouth which ended his powers of speech and screech, for the time being.

"This three-men-to-one is n't exactly what I like," Raleigh muttered in some disgust, as they were tying up the whilom guide. "But I don't see how it can be helped, under the circumstances."

"No, it is n't exactly a gentleman's game," Blythe assented. "But it was none of our seeking. *He* butted in."

The three carried Kotzalki back to the car, and Raleigh recovered his pistol which he had dropped when he sprang after the spy.

Leaving the other two and Merk to guard the prisoner, Raleigh took the bundle which contained the disguise for Princess Tassa, and made his way back to the road, now hardly less dark than the woods.

He proceeded with the greatest caution, in order to arouse the attention of no dog, whose barking might bring curious eyes upon him.

The sky was partially overcast, and he was tormented with the idea that in the darkness he should make a mistake in the house. The distance to the village was some half-mile, but in the vastness of

the night it seemed much farther before he espied a cottage on the right.

His heart beat high. Now, two on the left, and one on the right, and he would come to the police station. He edged over as far away from it as possible. Nevertheless a dog heard him and began to bark.

Raleigh stood absolutely still. A man came to the door of the police cottage and looked around. Evidently his dog was known to be of an imaginative disposition; for there came a boot-thud, a yelp from the dog, and the man walked back into the house.

When all was silent again, Raleigh crept forward. One more house on the left, and then the one set farther back from the road would be his goal.

Smaller and meaner than the habitation of the poorest person in Punchard was the little cabin in which Madame Arcadievna and the Princess Tassa lived. The rough shutters were closed, but a narrow slit of light came from under the door.

Raleigh knocked. A woman's voice answered in Russian. Again he knocked, softly, insistently.

This time some one moved to the door, and opened it slightly. A worn woman of about forty stood in the doorway and stared at the young man.

Oddly enough, Raleigh, now that he was at the goal he had come so far to reach, found it hard to begin.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, "do you speak English?"

The woman kept on staring, as if she did not understand his question, and could not believe her eyes.

Raleigh, who had no working knowledge of any other language than his own, was casting about in his mind what he could do, when the woman replied, as if in a daze: —

"Yes, I speak English. But who are you? You cannot be a new prisoner, for none have arrived."

"No, I'm not a prisoner, I've just reached here — "

"You have escaped?" the woman cried, a tone of hope — for him, not for her — in her voice. "Come!" she dragged him into the room, glancing fearfully out into the darkness, as she did so. "Papoudoff is always sneaking about and spying. He's new to the place here, and seems to imagine that if he does not keep a close eye on us we shall all run away — as if the thousands of miles between us and any civilization were not enough. But you! Where did you escape from? I can conceal you for to-night — unless the police are on your track?"

Into the torrent of eager words, Raleigh had had no chance to explain his mission. She turned and blew out the candle, explaining in a low tone: —

"Papoudoff may be around. He usually goes away if he finds the house dark, and we must not risk his coming in to-night, both on your account and on account of my poor friend, lying ill in the other room."

Raleigh's heart sank at her words.

"Not the Princess Tassa?" he asked.

The room was very dimly lighted by a few coals on the hearth. The woman leaned close to him and stared into his face.

"Princess Tassa!" she repeated slowly. "What do you know of her?"

"I have come to take her away," he blurted out. "Her father, Prince Anastasief, sent me. We are in an automobile race around the world — from New York to Paris — and hope to smuggle her out of the country. This is her disguise."

He stopped. There seemed to be so much to explain, and here in this bare hut, with dark Siberia stretching for thousands of miles on all sides of him, and in the dying light of the embers, it all sounded as improbable as the wildest imaginings of romance.

A weak voice called from the inner room.

Absently the woman answered; then turned with fierce joy to Raleigh: —

"Come and tell her what you have told me. I do not know whether I am mad and you a phantom of my disordered brain or not, — we go mad here in Siberia, if we do not die."

The woman had stepped over to the corner of the room. The words came to Raleigh out of the dark, and for an instance he was not sure that he himself was not mad, so fantastic and unreal did the whole

scene appear. He heard a groping about, and the striking of a match. With the lighting of the candle he was brought back to the reality of the miserable little room, bare of almost all that we consider the merest necessities, but scrupulously clean.

"Come," she repeated, "if you are real."

With the words she laid her hand on his arm, and felt of his coat; then turned and led the way through the narrow inner doorway.

The second room was still smaller — hardly more than a closet. In it were two scanty pallets, and on one of these lay a young girl.

Raleigh caught his breath as he saw her. She was like some precious jewel, shining from a dust-heap. He had expected to find a poor creature, worn and wasted by the terrible experiences she had undergone. And worn and wasted Princess Tassa was; but her dark pathetic beauty seemed only brought out the more clearly by her mean surroundings.

A wealth of black hair lay upon the rough pillow, and framed a face of almost unearthly beauty. Raleigh had never cared much for girls. He liked them in a brotherly way, but felt also a brotherly contempt for their lack of understanding of machinery. For the first time a woman's charm touched him — captivated him. And she on her part looked up and saw a tall youth, whose very bearing spoke of strength and resourcefulness and freedom. There was none of the cringing, the stolid endurance, or

of the bullying swagger to which she was accustomed. A being of another world stood before her.

"Who is it, Katia?" she asked slowly.

The other woman kneeled down beside the pallet, and took the young girl's head in her arms.

"Dearest," she said gently, "you must be brave. But not for bad news — for good."

She patted the girl's hand.

"We have learned to bear bad news," she said, with a wan smile at Raleigh. "We have better practice in that. But Tassa, my dear companion, you are to have your chance for happiness."

She spoke very soothingly, afraid of exciting the girl with her tidings.

"This gentleman has come from your father. He brings a disguise, and will take you away with him. You must be the brave girl you have always been, and prepare yourself for the labors of the journey before you."

A wild light of wondering hope had come into the sick girl's face. Her dark eyes turned from one to the other. No, it was no dream. They were there in the flesh — and Katia was patting her hand, and the young man was undoing a bundle containing a boy's suit — and it was the same mean little hole where for two years she had lived in despair, ever growing till it could see nothing except the grave before her.

Yet now this was all transfigured by the divine light of hope.

"Liberty!" she cried. "And to see my dear father! Ah! you do not know what I can bear for that."

Tears of joy were coursing down her cheeks; but they only seemed to give her strength and new life.

Anxiously the older woman asked:—

"Are you strong enough to undertake this journey? You have not left your bed for five days."

The girl laughed through her tears.

"Strength for that!" she cried. "It takes more strength to live through one day here in Irkiwatz than a thousand days of travel. But, oh! my Katia, how can I go away and leave you behind, you whose love has been all the world to me here?"

She put her arms around her friend, and drew her to her.

Madame Arcadievna returned the pressure of her arms, and then held her off and looked into her eyes.

"You forget, my Tassa, that only a little while ago you were lamenting that in a few months you would no longer have me with you. My twelve years of banishment will be at an end in May." She turned to Raleigh. "But, monsieur," she asked anxiously, "how do you propose to smuggle her out of the country? The authorities are most suspicious, and you will have need of papers."

"We have them," Raleigh replied. "You see, our papers call for the three of us and a guide.

Princess Tassa in her disguise can pretend to be our guide."

"If your papers call for a guide, how did they let you come here without one?"

"They did n't," Raleigh smiled. "We have got one, and what's more, he's an agent of the secret police, who has been following us all the way from New York. His name is Kotzalki. Do you know of him?"

At the mention of that name, Madame Arcadievna shrank as if a serpent had risen in her path.

"Do I know him! Do not many of us here know him?" she cried. "He sent my father to his death, and me here. Monsieur, and how do you expect to get rid of him? Kotzalki is not an easy man to deal with. If he has followed you from America, he is probably at this very moment with the police, and in an instant they may be here."

She wrung her hands with the dread which had replaced her former hope.

"No! no!" Raleigh said quickly. "Don't be afraid. He can't be with the police, because he is safely tied and gagged in our car. Our idea was to hand him over to you for trial and punishment, and take Princess Tassa in his place."

There came a knock at the outer door.

Instantly Madame Arcadievna blew out the light.

"They are here!" she cried in a despairing whisper. "We must hide you — where, oh! where?"

CHAPTER XLVIII

A PATIENT FOR WHOM THERE WAS NO HOPE

THE knock was repeated. A man's voice spoke in Russian.

"It is Stanislas. Thank God!" — To Raleigh: "He is one of us, a young physician, who comes every day to see what he can do for Tassa."

The American felt a twinge of jealousy that this Stanislas should minister to her.

Cautiously Madame Arcadievna opened the door and admitted the newcomer, before lighting the candle.

The physician's astonishment at seeing Raleigh was great. He was a young man of not more than thirty, but his abundant hair was snow-white.

When the situation was explained to him, Stanislas's face lighted up.

"Ah! that will do more for her than all the doctors and drugs in the world," he exclaimed. "And now we must see how we can manage to hide her flight as long as possible from Papoudoff. Every hour's start will increase her chances tremendously. If he does not get wind of her going by this automobile, the police will be hunting for her near here, when she will be afar off."

Into the Princess's beautiful eyes had come a shadow.

"But what will they do to you, my friends, when they discover that you have hidden my flight from them? I cannot bear the thought of making your lot more unhappy than it already is."

"What will they do to us?" repeated Stanislas in his deep voice. "What can they do? They cannot send us to Siberia — because we are there already. They cannot condemn us to insufficient and miserable quarters — because we have them already. They cannot make our lives a hell upon earth — because they are that already."

"But Katia! They will not let her go in May. They will make her stay here twelve years more."

"Dearest, do not mind me. My life is done. Willingly will I give what is left of it to bring liberty to your youth."

"Katia — yes," the physician murmured, his head sinking on his breast, and his brow contracted in thought.

In an instant he cried: —

"Ah! I have it! And this traitor, Kotzalki, shall help us for once in his life. I am the only physician here, and even Papoudoff relies upon me. When you are gone, there shall yet be a patient in this bed. It is so dark here that the difference will not be noticed without close examination — and Papoudoff fears sickness as he fears no other thing. Presently

your sickness will develop into plague. You could clear out the whole village with the word. Fortunately the house is a little apart. It will have no visitors. I will volunteer to nurse the patient, with Katia. You may die of the plague. Then I will offer to burn all the infected clothing, the house if need be, and the body: there will be a dead body to burn."

He spoke slowly and solemnly. He turned to Raleigh: —

"Don't think us cruel, monsieur. Four in this village did Kotzalki unjustly accuse — and he knew it. I was one — and my wife and child died on the road here of privation and bad treatment. For myself I would not mind so much — but, oh! the women and children who have suffered and died because of Kotzalki!"

A silence fell upon them. After a while the Princess said: —

"Katia, bring me your scissors." She raised herself up in bed. "Cut this hair off. As a guide I shall not need it, and Kotzalki may need it as a patient, if Papoudoff takes it into his head to glance into the room to see how I am doing."

For a minute the snip-snip of the scissors was heard, and Katia laid a mass of dark hair away, leaving a small, boyish head where a girl's had been.

CHAPTER XLIX

AN UNPLEASANT INTERRUPTION

THAT night witnessed as extraordinary an occurrence as ever happened in Siberia — and Siberia sees many an occurrence.

While the long darkness covered all the earth, four men, sent as convicts into this dread country through the false testimony of Kotzalki, now by poetic justice bore him into the village, muffled and bound.

And then a strange monster, such as never before in the world's long life had traversed this part of the country, tore along, piercing the darkness in front of it with a beam of light from its fiery eyes.

The monster passed through the village at the speed of the wind. Had any one been in its path he would have been crushed like a beetle. But no one was in its way. Some few heard the horrible snorting of its cut-out, and the dread of the unknown paralyzed them. They dared not look to see what it was. A dog or two yelped in terror, as it wildly sought its hole.

Papoudoff in his warm room heard it, too, and devoutly made the sign of the cross on his breast. For an instant he thought some unnamed dragon had come down from its lair in the frozen North; but

as it passed in a breath, he crossed himself again, and thought no more of it.

Meanwhile the motor was speeding away from Irkiwatz, once its goal, now spurned by its swiftly revolving tires. The little car, as if it knew that the time had come for its best endeavors, sped on through the night with never a falter of its stout gasolene heart.

Four figures were in it, and a dog, as there had been the last few days; but where a round-bellied guide had sat, was now a slender figure, with a pale young face, transfigured by the hope which burned in the dark pathetic eyes.

Billy was at the wheel; for his sight had proved the best for night driving. Blythe was beside him. Raleigh on the rear seat sat by the young Princess.

By an inexplicable oversight they had not brought along a fur coat for her. But she did not complain: bravely she turned up the collar of her boy's jacket, and snuggled down as far as possible into her seat, with Merk — who had made friends with her at once — at her feet.

The speed of the *Phœnix Bird* filled her with an awful fascination. It was uncanny thus to be dashing through the night, — the magic carpet could hardly have been more so.

In the cone of light which cut into the blackness in front, she saw her familiar little world flash into

sight, like a sudden vision, and then sink into oblivion behind.

High rose her spirits at this masterful rending asunder of the web of fate in which she had been entangled for a two years' eternity; and her blood leaped through her arteries as if her buoyant hopes alone were sufficient to keep off the cold of a Siberian night.

Raleigh only noticed her thinly clad condition after they had left the village behind. In a matter-of-fact way he stood up and began taking off his fur coat.

"Oh, no! please don't!" she protested. "You are not used to going without it, while I am well accustomed to this climate."

The American laughed an odd little laugh that had almost a sob in it.

"Do you think I'd sit here in furs and let you freeze beside me?"

"But see, your lovely dog is keeping me quite warm."

"A very good example he is setting his master."

The girl saw that it was useless to protest further, and permitted Raleigh to put his coat around her.

Blythe whispered something to Billy, and looked at his watch. After half an hour's steady going he stood up in his seat and began pulling off his own overcoat.

"What are you doing?" Raleigh asked.

"Half-hour's up. My turn."

"Hold on there! I shan't take your coat," Raleigh protested.

"See here, young fellow, Billy and I have held an Initiative and Referendum on the front seat and we've decided that it's to be turn and turn about — half an hour at a time; and we're in a clear majority of two to one, — ladies not yet having the ballot," with a courtly wave of his hand to the Princess. "We'll get another at the first town we come to."

All night they traveled without a stop. They felt pretty sure Princess Tassa's flight would not be discovered; but if by some evil chance it were, the more miles that lay between them and Papoudoff, the greater their chance would be. No telegraph line ran within thirty miles of Irkiwatz. He would probably hunt for her in the near neighborhood; for that she had escaped in a motor-car would hardly occur to the police in their wildest conjectures.

The fatigue of the long drive, coming immediately after a week's illness in bed, the Princess bore with a fortitude worthy of a hardened soldier; but toward noon, after fourteen hours' of continuous travel, Blythe noticed that in spite of her indomitable will she was beginning to droop. A short rest and some more nourishing food than she could get while the car was in motion seemed to him imperative for her. He knew that it would distress her greatly

to think that she was delaying the others, and increasing their danger, by her weakness. He turned suddenly and exclaimed: —

"I declare I'm all fagged out — and mighty near starved. Let's stop right here and build a fire, and I'll make you the finest dish of stone soup that ever was ladled."

"What is stone soup?" asked Billy.

"Never heard of stone soup?" Blythe cried, in the greatest surprise. "Why, my son, where were you brought up? Not know stone soup? Well! That state of ignorance should be dispelled at once, if not sooner."

"But don't you think we ought to get as far from Irkiwatz as possible?" asked Raleigh.

In his intense fear lest Princess Tassa fall again into the hands of the police, he could not bear the thought of stopping.

Blythe turned around. The Princess's eyes were almost closed with fatigue. He gave a significant nod in her direction, and rattled on cheerfully: —

"Of course we ought — ought to dispel this disgraceful state of Billy's ignorance on the instant. I'll bet you don't know stone soup yourself, and are trying to distract my attention."

"All right," laughed Raleigh, "how do you begin?"

"The first thing is to find the proper kind of stone. I'll have to do that; and meanwhile you and

Billy might take your guns and see if you can't shoot some kind of a bird. There are a lot of them sitting about."

The car was drawn up at the side of the road. The country was very wild here, and they had seen many game birds as they passed along.

"Let me do something to help," said the Princess, rousing up from her seat.

"I am very sorry to say, mademoiselle," Blythe replied urbanely, "that the position of cook is already filled."

"But I am not applying for the position of cook," persisted the Princess. "I only aspire to be waitress."

Raleigh had been arranging the cushions his mother had made for him in the most comfortable way on the rear seat.

"Come!" he said gently; "you must rest."

Without a word she obeyed him, and he covered her with the fur coats they had taken off. Then he and Billy went off in different directions in search of game. With a joyous bark Merk rushed gamboling ahead of his master, and was much chagrined at being called to heel.

Blythe busied himself in building a fire and getting everything ready, while Princess Tassa sank into slumber.

In a quarter of an hour there came a shot from the right, followed by three more in quick succes-

sion — the agreed signal of success. Five minutes later the hunters returned, Billy carrying a fine large bird, something like a pheasant.

"That 's good! Almost as important as the stone," Blythe commented. "Now, you fellows roll that log up a bit for a seat, and lend a hand to pluck the bird; and don't make any more noise than necessary, in order that our fair guide may have a little more rest. By the way, where is Merk?"

"Hullo!" Raleigh looked around him. "He has given me the slip. I guess he must have made up his mind to stretch his legs a bit. He will turn up presently."

"When the scent of stone soup is wafted out on the circumambient atmosphere, he will come quickly enough. Here is the stone."

He exhibited a pebble half the size of his fist.

"I found a spring over yonder, too, in which I laved the stone. Some don't approve of that, but I do. Now, you observe, I put it into this saucepan of ours, and cover it with water. Then this bird, cleaned and dismembered, is added. It will improve the flavor. Also a tin of corned beef, a bit of butter, salt, and pepper. If we had onions, carrots, tomatoes, and a few other simple things, we 'd put them in, too; but we have n't. — Never mind! Now, I 'll let it boil over the fire for a while, to get plenty of strength out of the stone. There! the seasoning seems to be all right. I guess I 'll add three or four

hard-tack to give it a little more body — that stone was a trifle lean."

Blythe was in his element, fussing about and putting on the airs of a chef.

"All I need is a big white apron, a little pointed beard, and a French accent to be a sure-enough cook," he said complacently. "I've often thought I should have made far more money in cooking than in writing poetry." He sighed.

A pleasant sizzling came from the skillet. The three watched it, inhaling the delicious odor that was wafted to their nostrils.

Blythe presently lifted the cover, and gave it a critical glance.

"It is quite ready; but before serving it I think I'll take out the stone. By not eating it we can use it several times without impairing its efficiency."

The Princess had waked up much refreshed, and heard these last words, which Blythe was delivering with admirable gravity and condescension, and disconcerted him by laughing as he fished out the stone.

"What a wonderful cook you must be!" she cried.

"Thank you, madam," he replied. "The youth of my native land are very insufficiently educated in the fundamental arts of living. Either of these intelligent individuals might be imprisoned in a hardware store full of cooking-ranges, with a barrel of

fine stones at hand — and die of starvation. Now, most honored guest, if you will take your place with the others on this log, I will proceed to serve you with such utensils as we possess."

All of them were only too glad to sit anywhere else rather than in the gyrocar, for a change. Princess Tassa was served in a tin cup; Blythe took the top of the skillet; while Billy and Raleigh ate amicably out of the skillet itself. They all declared truthfully that they had rarely tasted anything more delicious than this stone soup.

That log had never borne so festive a quartette. The cheerful diners had just finished the last drop of the soup — with the exception of a little left for Merk — when they heard a rustle behind them.

Blythe glanced over his shoulder and found himself staring into the muzzles of three rifles, not ten feet distant.

CHAPTER L

THE PHŒNIX BIRD IN CAPTIVITY

"H'M!" Blythe coughed, setting down his skillet cover with care, "I don't wish to give you all a start, but behind us there are three of the toughest looking customers I ever saw. Don't move! Their guns are cocked."

The newspaper man spoke calmly. His companions remained quiet. The first thought of them all was that they had fallen into the hands of the police. But Princess Tassa, after a glance, said in an undertone, "They are brigands."

Indeed, the leveled guns were held by as dirty and villainous a trio as one would wish to avoid. One was a huge man, upon whose brutal features played a grin of satisfaction.

Raleigh looked toward the car, where their own arms were, and for a moment contemplated making a bolt for it. But such a move would have been sheer madness. The faces of the brigands showed that they meant business; and at such short range there was no possibility of their missing him, should they shoot.

The big leader gave a shout, and some fifteen

more men came skulking out of the underbrush, all armed with guns, pistols, and knives.

"It is better not to resist," said Tassa. "It would only make them worse."

"We may be able to buy ourselves off, if we can keep them in good humor," Blythe added grimly.

A word from the leader and the bandits gripped their prisoners, tied their hands behind them with rawhide thongs, and threw them on the ground.

Raleigh, when he saw how roughly they handled the girl, would have struggled even against those odds had he not already been helpless.

After they were made fast, Merk came bounding up out of the woods, and with a ferocious growl sprang at his friends' captors. Raleigh sharply called him off, just as one of the men was raising his gun to shoot him. At the same instant another of the bandits, who evidently valued a good dog, struck up his companion's arm; then patted his knee and called enticingly to Merk. But the collie, growling and bristling, came and lay down beside his master.

The brigand, having finished with their prisoners, turned their attention to the *Phœnix Bird*. They laid down their rifles and clustered about it, examining it from every side with the greatest interest and suspicion. No such object had ever before been their booty.

What could it be? A living thing, or some devilish contrivance which might spring upon them at

any moment? Their excited comments filled the air, every man having a different theory. They circled about it, stealthily drawing nearer and nearer, watching it closely to see if it showed any signs of attacking them.

In its monstrous passivity it appeared quite harmless, and finally two of the boldest from among them dared touch it.

Their hands chanced to fall upon the hot hood.

With yells of terror they jumped back, declaring that it had stung them; and the whole group retreated to a safe distance.

One of them went for his rifle, and brought it to his shoulder.

The big chief gave him a buffet on the side of the head that sent him and his gun sprawling.

"What! irritate the thing by shooting at it!"

The overturned brigand picked himself and his gun up, muttering. He did not offer further violence to the gyrocar.

The prisoners, although momentarily unnoticed, could not tell how long they would be forgotten. And then what would be their fate?

Raleigh's thoughts were bitter, indeed. Through his sheer carelessness Tassa was now in a plight worse than that from which he had rescued her.

He should never have permitted Merk to run away from him. Merk would have given the alarm. He should not have let them all sit on the log with

their backs in the same direction. He should have kept his arms by him.

If he could only lay his hand on a gun, now that their captors were all absorbed in the car! He tugged and strained at his bonds, but only succeeded in cutting his wrists with the thongs, which had been drawn cruelly tight.

Yet his physical pain was nothing to his mental anguish.

Unconsciously he groaned.

"Do your wrists hurt you very much?" asked Tassa softly.

Raleigh shook his head. "It was of you I was thinking."

Billy asked: "Do you see any way of getting out of this?"

His faith in Raleigh's resourcefulness was still supreme.

Miserably Raleigh shook his head again.

The brigands had gathered in a knot and were listening intently to one who was holding forth to them. He was the least considered member of the band, and scant attention had been paid his words until the monster had stung two of their boldest comrades. He pointed to the car, trotted up and down, and then gave a wide sweep with his hand to indicate extreme speed. He had a vague notion of the capabilities of an automobile, and was expounding it to his fellows.

A consultation followed, some wishing to see a demonstration of this extraordinary power of motion of the monster, and others arguing against tampering with it.

The huge chief at length spoke, and his words ended the debate.

The cluster of men drifted down on their prisoners. Some seized Blythe, and some Raleigh, and a violent dispute ensued between the partizans of one and those of the other. Finally those of Raleigh carried the day, and Blythe was unceremoniously dumped back upon the ground.

Raleigh's hands were untied. He was dragged and pushed toward the *Phœnix Bird.* The big chief thrust his face down within a few inches of Raleigh's and delivered a long harangue, punctuating it by poking his pistol into the American's face, and making the motion of drawing his knife across his prisoner's throat.

Previously the chief had given an order to one of his men, who dashed off into the woods, and now came back with a long braided lariat. One end of this the chief tied around his own waist, the other around Raleigh's; and he gave him a shove toward the gyrocar.

Raleigh had no difficulty in gathering from all this that he was to give an exhibition of the car's powers, and must make no attempt to escape as he valued his life.

He climbed into the *Phœnix Bird* and prepared to start, his mind doing the hardest thinking of his life. Here was an opportunity given him: how could he utilize it?

Slowly he set the car in motion, backward. He took pains that it should go no faster than a walk, in order to afford his captors no ground for suspicion.

As the car moved off, the brigands capered about it, uttering whoops of amazement and delight. Evidently this monster was quite docile in the hands of its keeper, and of their own ability to handle its keeper they had no doubts.

Raleigh heard Tassa softly calling Merk to her.

The gyrocar had never in its existence figured in so odd a triumphal procession. These wild creatures were frenzied in their joy at this new toy which had fallen into their possession. For a quarter of a mile they capered about the *Bird* like goats. Then there came an imperious tug at the lariat, and Raleigh obediently stopped the car.

The chief's exhilaration had gone to his head. He would show his men of what audacity he was capable. With a confident smile he approached the car, and prepared to mount it before his admiring followers.

He put one hand on its side.

It did not sting him.

He lifted a huge foot and placed it upon the step.

This development did not accord with a desperate plan for escape which Raleigh had formed.

The shift of a lever, the motion of a foot, and the car dashed forward, nearly upsetting the chief. With a savage cry of rage he recovered his balance and sprinted after the car. For a few seconds he pounded furiously along just behind it; when he saw that he could not catch it he stopped, snatched a pistol from his belt and took quick aim at Raleigh's head.

CHAPTER LI

POOR MERK!

THE chief was a dead shot, but at the very instant that he pulled the trigger of his pistol, the lariat tightened and jerked him three feet into the air.

There was a *bang!* from the pistol, but the bullet went hurtling into the sky, while the weapon itself flew from his grasp.

Down came the big chief, squirming like an eel and trying desperately to regain his footing and to free himself from the lariat. But the *Phœnix Bird* moved mercilessly on, and the chief had to follow, sometimes on his feet, more often dragging on his back or his stomach.

The brigands were so thunderstruck that for a few seconds they stood stock-still, and watched their chief bouncing along behind the car, like a tin can tied to a dog's tail.

Then they did wake up enough to fire off a fusillade of pistol shots which did no damage. Only one man held a gun, and he did not shoot. His head still buzzed from the blow it had received from his chief, and he was not sorry to see him humiliated.

Raleigh crouched low in the car, to afford as small

a target as possible. He was so nerved up that he hardly noticed the lariat around his waist, though for weeks afterwards he felt half cut in two.

A few hundred yards away lay the captives. Would he have time to reach them, lift them into the car, and start again before any of his pursuers came up with him?

It was a long chance, impeded as the speed of the car was by the dragging weight of the chief.

He glanced over his shoulder. Two lithe young fellows had far outstripped their companions, and were only fifty yards away. Each of them had a pistol in his hand. The foremost one had already emptied his futilely at Raleigh, and could only use it to threaten with. The other had still one shot in reserve.

The grinding brakes brought the car to a stop at the scene of Blythe's stone soup and, to Raleigh's amazement, all three of the prisoners scrambled to their feet.

Swiftly as everything passed, it yet enabled the two pursuers to come within a few feet of the car. Here Merk took a hand in the game. He attacked them with such ferocity that he toppled the first man head over heels, and leaped at the second one's throat.

The latter had meant to reserve his last bullet for the recapture of the gyrocar, but his own instant danger drove this purpose from his mind. He fired

point-blank at Merk, and the collie rolled over and over on the ground and lay still.

"He 's killed Merk!" Billy cried.

He caught up a gun, so filled with rage and sorrow that he had no thought except to fight the brigands.

Raleigh laid a hand on Billy's arm and pointed to three brigands galloping through the woods on ponies.

"They can surround us and pick us off from the underbrush. We dare n't take such risks — for *her* sake. Cut the rope, and let 's go."

"We 'll do better than that with our bedraggled friend," put in Blythe. "We 'll make a bulwark of him. Princess, get in the front seat. Billy, lend a hand."

They lifted the gasping chief and laid him along the back of the rear seat. Scrambling in themselves, they held him in this uncomfortable position.

"Shoot ahead, if you want to," Blythe yelled.

The mass of the brigands were now dangerously near. They hesitated to shoot, however, when they saw that it would endanger the life of their own chief.

The little car plunged ahead at full speed, and soon the brigands dwindled into specks in the distance. Then only was the chief dumped by the roadside, having recovered his breath but not his arrogant demeanor.

It was a sad little car which pursued its course after its fortunate escape; for those in it could not forget poor Merk, left behind with a brigand's bullet in him.

Raleigh's sorrow was rendered even more poignant when he learned how his friends had managed to get rid of their bonds.

"It was Merk, and Princess Tassa," Billy told him. "As soon as you drove off with the bandits, she began talking to Merk and trying to make him bite her thongs. He could not understand at first, and only licked her hands and whined. But after a while he saw what she wanted, and gnawed away at them until she was free. Without rising from the ground she cut ours, so that we were all ready when you came up. I had an idea you might try something like this when I saw you start off backward instead of forward."

"Poor Merk!" said the Princess softly. "He first freed us, and then gave his life to save us."

CHAPTER LII

A SCRATCHING OUTSIDE THE DOOR

At five o'clock that day they arrived at a fair-sized village where they decided to spend the night. But for the delay occasioned by the bandits they could have reached a larger town soon after nightfall. This was now impossible unless they were to go a number of hours in the dark. To tell the truth, their nerves were considerably shaken by their encounter. They had come so near a complete ending of their journey that all other risks loomed up larger than common.

The inn where they were to spend the night, as was usual in Siberia, was a most miserable affair. It offered only one large living-room, where all its guests were welcome to such rest as they could obtain on wooden benches around the walls, or on the floor. In the same room bitter tea, with salt, and black bread was served to any newcomer who called for it, at no matter what time of the day or night.

To such hardships our three Americans had become used, if not reconciled; and Princess Tassa bore everything with the greatest cheerfulness. Each

discomfort was to her but a stepping-stone toward freedom — nor had her own life during the last two years been of a kind to make her particular.

None of the four in the gyrocar had rested for two days, and to their tired bodies the primitive arrangements, on this occasion, seemed almost luxurious. Wrapped in their furs, they dropped off to sleep as soon as their heads lay upon the hard wooden benches; and they slept soundly the whole night through, in spite of the occasional opening of the door, admitting icy drafts into the hot room, and in spite of the heavy tramping of other travelers and of the Imperial postman, as they came and went.

It was seven o'clock, long after the usual hour for getting off, and our tired motorists were still asleep. Raleigh was the first to stir. Dimly he became aware of a scratching and whining, at first so faint that it melted into a dream, then more and more insistent, until finally he half awoke, murmuring, —

"Keep quiet, Merk, old chap, and let me sleep."

His own words roused him to fuller consciousness, and to the sad remembrance that Merk was dead.

"I thought I heard you, Merk," he said.

The next instant he started up, fully awake. There *was* a whining and scratching at the door.

Breathless, he listened for a second; then bounded up, shouting: —

"Merk! Merk!"

His cry awakened his companions, and they, as well as the others in the room beheld him wrenching open the door, catching a very woe-begone and bloody collie to his breast, and hugging and kissing him with frantic joy.

It was Merk, with a furrow ploughed along the top of his skull, which had knocked him insensible, though it had not really hurt him badly. He was so tired, that after licking his master's face feebly, he sank down utterly worn out.

By what instinct he had been able to track his master, who can tell? Weak with loss of blood, he must have traveled all night; and had the village been a mile or two farther on, he might not have been able to reach it.

Never was an invalid more tenderly cared for than Merk was. The Princess, who had become an expert nurse in attending to the peasants on her father's estate, took complete charge of him. His wounded head was bathed in warm water, dried and bandaged.

Blythe skirmished about the village until he had located a hen, and had obtained possession of it. Under his hands, the hen turned to soup in a short time, and Merk's share of this revived him wonderfully.

This return of Merk had so completely absorbed the attention of them all that it was with quite a

shock that Raleigh beheld through the window the well-known uniform of the police.

This first encounter with them since the rescue of Princess Tassa filled him with apprehension, the more so when he noticed that instead of a single official, such as usually came to examine their papers, this time there were four, two of whom went around to the rear of the inn, while the other two came in at the front door.

Raleigh touched Tassa's arm.

"Would n't it be better for you to be out of the room while they are here?" he said.

She nodded. She had been into the kitchen several times for hot water for Merk, and quietly slipped in there again.

CHAPTER LIII

WHAT THEY HEARD THROUGH THE SILENT NIGHT

THE two police officials entered the large room. Their appearance roused little general interest, since they always came to inquire into the business of travelers.

The one, a large, stupid fellow, in whose round eyes shone a dumb, bovine curiosity as he looked at the Americans, took his station by the door, as if to cut off their exit.

The other, a fierce little man, evidently the superior, strode forward, bristling with official dignity, and directed a sharp question at the Americans. As this was uttered in Russian, it was only answered by the production of their papers.

With dismay Raleigh noticed that these did not seem to satisfy him at all. He glanced at them perfunctorily, tossed them on a bench, and uttered a fresh stream of questions.

"Ah, that 's German he 's speaking now," drawled Blythe. "Guten Tag!"

"Guten Tag," replied the official, and plunged into another torrent of words.

"He sets too fast a pace for me. Most of these

foreigners do. It seems to go with being a foreigner. But I 'll just say something in the same language to encourage him. He might get lonely talking all by himself."

Blandly he turned to the little Russian : —

"Pretzeln ! Zwei Bier ! Prosit ! "

The official stared at him ; then struck off into another long harangue, until, seeing from the newspaper man's face that not a word was understood, he stopped, and very slowly and distinctly asked another question.

Blythe's face brightened.

"That 's French — I know that. After he 's worked around through Italian and Portuguese, he may reach English by degrees. Parlez-vous? Oui! Oui!"

"Ah ! mais, monsieur, pourquoi ne m'aviez vous pas dit que vous parliez le français? Maintenant nous pouvons nous entendre," the official rattled on.

"There he goes again, using all the words in the dictionary, and piling 'em on so thick you can't breathe. If these chaps would only see the beauty of words of one syllable, and not more than four in a sentence, it would conduce to a great deal of pleasure all around. What in thunder do you suppose he 's trying to say to us? "

Blythe with his facetious remarks was only marking time. He was quite aware how desperate their case was. Even when they had lain on the ground,

bound by the brigands, things had been no blacker than they now appeared.

At this instant Tassa came into the room, a policeman on each side of her. Raleigh turned white. His eyes shone with unnatural brilliancy. He glanced at his companions. They were ready to second him in no matter what wild attempt he might make to prevent her arrest.

His hand stole to the pocket where his automatic pistol lay.

"Not yet, my son," drawled Blythe. "Let them show their hand a little more."

The Princess came on, looking exactly like a handsome boy of sixteen. She was talking to the officials with quiet self-possession, though her face was very pale.

Without paying any attention to her friends, she addressed herself to the chief, and he entered into an animated conversation with her, which to the Americans, who could not understand a word of it, seemed interminable.

All the other people in the room forsook their own affairs and clustered about the Princess and the chief, listening to every word with rapt attention.

As the chief talked with the Princess, he became more and more excited. He raised his head, gesticulating violently, and finally brought his palm down on the shoulder of the girl.

This seemed the end.

As if it had been an agreed signal, the hands of the three Americans sought their pistols.

A hair's breadth separated those four policemen from death—their death, and then the insanely impossible dash for liberty, through this huge land hostile to all forms of liberty.

Tassa turned, and read their intention.

She gave a little sob, like a child.

"They only want to see the car," she said. "The sergeant here has a brother who works in a machine shop in Germany, and he has written to him about automobiles, and what they could do. He did not believe that his brother spoke the truth until he heard that we had come in one of those machines. He wants to see it."

"Is that all?" Raleigh cried.

"Yes," she answered, and the word was a sigh of thankfulness.

In the exuberance of his relief, Raleigh exclaimed:—

"I'll give him and his three men a ride all over town"; and solemnly the instruments of the law were paraded up and down the village street, to the great excitement of the whole populace.

Afterwards, in a hurricane of outlandish words, which none but Tassa could understand, the *Phœnix Bird* took its departure.

"Weren't you frightened?" Raleigh asked of the

girl, when they were speeding on their way again. "You looked so cool, when you came in."

She smiled.

"Would you really like to know?"

He nodded.

"I was so frightened when I first saw them that I could not use my tongue. I had to say to myself that your life — the lives of all of you depended on my courage." She smiled again. "I shan't be so frightened next time. You see, it was the first time I had to speak with officials as a free person would. You don't know what an effect their uniform has on us. But I think now you can trust me."

Billy asked presently: —

"Have n't we got back on the regular route mapped out for the race, Blythe?"

"Yes, we came directly south from Irkiwatz, and the last village is on the regular route."

"Then I guess the curiosity of those officials meant that no other auto has passed along here, does n't it, and that we are still in the lead?"

"By Jupiter Tonans! it does!"

This thought exhilarated them all, and the day, a gorgeous one, — the first that could be called a spring day, — added to their exhilaration. It was succeeded by a wonderful array of similar days, and the *Phœnix Bird* took advantage of the dry roads and mild skies to get over as much ground as possible.

There was no indication that Doctor Stanislas's plans for covering Tassa's flight had miscarried. Just the same, they could not feel that she was safe until she was out of Siberia — out of Russia.

That Prince Anastasief was a good organizer they had proof at nearly everywhere they stopped. Supplies of petrol and of oil were always awaiting them, and often they found in attendance a skilled mechanic to assist in making any repairs that might be needed on the *Phœnix Bird.*

Thus, in spite of their small horse-power, they kept up a very good rate of speed.

A week passed. There was no sign of any other car.

"Too bad we can't get a race out of this," said Blythe one night.

A moon which, as a slender crescent, had looked upon them when they had had quite a different guide, now had grown so plump that it afforded them much assistance. When they stopped to light the lamps, they heard far behind them a faint but ominous sound.

"Hark! what is that?" cried Billy.

They all strained their eyes and ears.

Nothing was to be seen, but from afar, through the silent night, they made out the unmistakable chug-chug of a motor-car.

CHAPTER LIV

RED TAPE — TO CUT

THE half-admitted dream of keeping in the lead which had been in the Americans' minds was snuffed out like a candle, yet none of them betrayed his disappointment.

They were safely housed at Ulrach before the *Liebig* puffed into town, rattling like an ice-wagon, but splendid in its huge power.

"Hullo, Willie Jag, we have been hoping you 'd come up to make a race of it," said Blythe, with cheerful mendacity.

Wildejagd's broad red face was all grin as he replied: —

"It iss nod a race you desire. It iss a gontest in skeeing ofer der snow, und joomping ditches, und such monkey bissness. Ya, it iss a goot liddle car; but ofer real r-roads you vatch de *Liebig*."

They found it difficult to "vatch de *Liebig*," however. For half an hour, the next morning, they managed to keep in sight of it; then it drew away from them, in spite of the best efforts of the *Phœnix Bird*, and was lost to sight.

Three days later, the *Briquette* caught up with

them, only to leave them behind in turn; and a day afterwards the *Ischia* passed them, with a gay waving of hands.

They passed a plain granite shaft, and in leaving it behind rolled from one continent into another. Asia, terrible Asia, lay behind them. They were now in Europe — in Russia, which holds so large a part of Asia under its sway.

Soon after this, Raleigh and the Princess were sitting together on the rear seat.

"What is it you are thinking of so hard?" he asked, noting the intense thoughtfulness on her face.

"You have done so much for me," she answered in an undertone; "will you not let me do a little for you?"

He leaned toward her, so that his words should be for her alone: —

"You do not know how much you have already done for me — by just letting me know you. I used to be a sordid sort of a chap. I only thought of machinery — while now — "

She dropped her eyes before his ardent gaze.

"While now — ?" she asked.

"Now, I think — of you."

A tender smile curled the corners of her lips.

"Then, I must think for you," she said. "I know what it would mean for you to win this race, and my weight must hinder you somewhat. Soon we shall

be passing through a town where I have friends with whom you could leave me. They can smuggle me out of the country."

Raleigh shook his head in vehement protest.

"But my weight must make some difference," she pleaded.

"It *does* make a difference — to me; and not to win all the races in the world would I have you run the smallest unnecessary risk. You are safer — at least, I feel that you are safer with me."

She smiled up at him.

"And I, too, feel safer with you than anywhere else in the world."

Russia was two thirds crossed without mishap, and the *Phœnix Bird* was steadily plugging away, when, late one afternoon, at a small railway station, they were unexpectedly stopped by an official who was possessed of more than the usual amount of official stupidity and reverence for red tape.

He was the hairiest man they had ever seen. His head was a perfect mop of hair, his whiskers came up to his eyes, and jets of hair spouted from his ears and nose. He was a walking bush.

They offered him their papers. He did not take them. Instead, he plied them with questions.

The Princess, acting as interpreter, answered them all. He still remained unsatisfied.

"You say you are racing the cars which passed

through here before you? But they had four wheels, and you have only two; therefore you cannot be racing *them*. One does not race a cow and a horse together."

He was triumphant in his logic.

"But we *are* racing them. If you will examine our papers you will *see* that we are. And you are commanded to let us pass through Russia without hindrance."

"That may be, or it may not," replied the hairy one. "I cannot tell at present. I have broken my glasses. Without them I cannot see what I am commanded to do. Moreover, in an hour a special train will pass, bearing a Grand Duke. It goes without stopping from here to the German frontier. It has the right of way over all other trains," he ended proudly.

"We are very pleased to learn about the Grand Duke, but we, too, wish to get to the German frontier with as little stopping as possible."

"Aha!" the Russian cried, with an expression of great shrewdness. "How do I know that you are not anarchists, planning to lay explosives on the track and blow him up?"

"You ought to know it the same way you know I'm not Teddy Roosevelt — by the smile on my face," muttered Blythe.

Tassa did not translate the remark.

"You could not go on anyhow," the official con-

tinued. "It will soon be night, and there is a storm coming besides. Look behind you!" The eastern sky, indeed, was black with clouds. "I can direct you to shelter. I sometimes accommodate travelers in my house," the official added ingenuously. "My charges are reasonable, though my expenses are high. There is no regular inn here. Just wait until the train passes. Then I shall be at liberty, and can conduct you to my house."

There seemed no way of getting past the obdurate official except by driving over him, and that would not be a profitable act.

Into Raleigh's eyes came one of his far-away looks, and a slight smile hovered on his lips.

Blythe was angry; Princess Tassa was discouraged; but Billy, who noticed the expression on his chum's face, waited hopefully.

At length Raleigh came out of his trance.

"Very well," he said, "if we cannot proceed on this road, I suppose we can't."

The official nodded his wooden head in approval.

The other passengers in the gyrocar had become aware of a certain quality of elation in Raleigh's resignation, an elation which was reflected sympathetically in Billy.

"Tell him, please, that we'll back up the road a bit and take off our tires," Raleigh said to Tassa.

"Take off the tires!" Blythe cried. "Is anything the matter with them?"

"No, nothing at all," replied Raleigh blandly. "We'll just take 'em off same as you unharness a horse."

As he was speaking, he slowly and solemnly closed the eye which was on the offside of his head from the official.

Blythe asked no more questions. Billy coughed in an embarrassed manner.

Princess Tassa, with a quick glance from one to the other of the Americans, translated the message.

"And ask him if he would mind my leaning the car up against a tree somewhere. I noticed a good stout one by the track, back yonder."

The official would have no objection to that, if he first examined the car and discovered no bombs concealed about it.

His search revealing none, he graciously permitted the *Phœnix Bird* to lean against the tree.

Raleigh took off his cap and bowed low.

"Give him our thanks, and assure him that if we injure the tree in any way we shall be glad to pay for the damage."

He drove the *Phœnix Bird* slowly backward till it came to the tree. It stood just beside the track.

"Now, off with the tires!"

Billy set to work. The newspaper man planted himself in front of Raleigh.

"My young and ingenious friend, would you mind telling me what all this 'monkey bissness' means?"

"Wait till the Grand Duke's train has passed," replied Raleigh, "and you will see."

CHAPTER LV

A MAGICAL TRANSITION

WHILE the other two were busy taking the tires off the gyrocar, Blythe and the Princess loitered around rather disconsolately.

The newspaper man stepped on the track and looked longingly in the direction they wished to go.

"See those two gleaming rails? They lead toward the glorious west — to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Princess. That's what you will find in my country — life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The last one, at times, is a somewhat arduous affair, but at least you don't find a dunderheaded cop blocking the trail because he has broken his goggles."

"The ideals of your country are very beautiful," the Princess answered. "Let us hope some day they will become the ideals of the whole world, and that there shall be no such word as Siberia."

"There will never be Siberia again in mine, if I can help it," said Blythe firmly. "The little old United States is good enough for me."

"Ah! it is good enough for any one — that glorious country of yours, which shall soon be mine as

well." With a touch of sadness: "It does not seem fair that we should be happy there, when so many persons here might be helped by us. But what can we do? They will never permit my father to return to Russia again. I shall become an American, like you, when once I have escaped across the border. What do you think is the plan in Mr. Kilbreth's mind?"

"I don't know. If I could think of all the things in 'Mr. Kilbreth's' mind, I should n't be doing newspaper work at forty per. I 'd be inventing aeroplanes to destroy Dreadnoughts; and sky-guns to destroy aeroplanes; and wireless boogums to destroy sky-guns; and something or other to destroy boogums. As a result of which services to the world, I should be called a great man and be showered with wealth. As it is, I solace my soul with poetry."

"Oh! are you a poet?"

"Well, in a manner of speaking, I am," returned Blythe modestly. "Now this track has been suggesting things to me: —

You gleaming rails,
For carrying mails,
They lead to freedom
And eke to —

I have n't been able to get a rhyme for freedom — There she blows!"

From far up the track sounded the toot of a whistle.

The train went fussily by without stopping. It

was composed of an engine, a tender piled high with coal, and two *wagons-lits*, and was no sixty-miles-an-hour flyer, special though it might be, and possessed of the right of way to the German frontier.

"Stand by, now, Blythe, and help put the *Bird* on the rail," shouted Raleigh.

"*W-h-a-t?*"

"Quick! Up she goes!"

In a dazed way Blythe lent a hand. Their experience with the rope on the bridges of Japan had made them expert at the job, and with a quick heave they lifted first the front wheel and then the back one on the rail, the bare rims grasping it securely.

Blythe gaped at it. His unmechanical mind never could become quite reconciled to the gyroscopic qualities of the *Phœnix Bird*. Each new manifestation of its powers caused him fresh astonishment; and now to perceive it balancing itself on the rail was as freshly wonderful to him as if he had not already seen it balancing itself for thousands of miles with no more lateral support than it received on the rail.

"All aboard!" cried Billy; and in a minute the car was gliding smoothly toward the station, gathering speed with every second.

The bushy official caught sight of it, and with a yell leaped on the track to stop it.

For an instant Raleigh feared he should have to run him down. Instinctively his hand closed on the

rubber bulb of the horn, and two terrific *Honks* fairly blew the Russian from the track. So awful a voice he had never heard before.

The station dropped behind them like a plummet into the sea. In a flash it had gone out of their lives forever, and they were flying toward the west at a rate of speed the *Phœnix Bird* had never made before. For never in all its varied experience — over good roads, over the velvety snow, over the brilliant glittering crust — had it had such perfect going as on this shining rail. Friction with the earth seemed eliminated from its labor.

The transition from being helplessly blocked on the road to this state of magical progression was so sudden that the passengers in the car could hardly believe they were not dreaming.

It was yet fair and light to the west. A golden sunset embraced half the sky, but it was no more golden than the vision of a far-away western hemisphere which was the ultimate goal of their journey.

Behind them was racing the lurid hurricane, like the menacing hand of Darkest Russia, stretched out to overwhelm them utterly with its baleful power, ere they could escape beyond its borders. The forerunning wind of the storm swept along beside the car. The trees, with their swelling buds, writhed in agony before its power. Clouds of dust arose, like evil genii, and tore madly over the face of the earth and then vanished into the upper air.

In the ever-lessening daylight, those in the *Phœnix Bird* saw all this, for the moment out of it — as, for the moment, they felt out of the power of the Czar. They were almost in a dead calm; for they were flying along as fast as the wind itself. Raleigh was leaning over the wheel, urging on the creature of his brain to the utmost of its speed.

"Yes, we had *better* make hay," muttered the newspaper man. "I suppose that chap will wire ahead and have us held up at the next station, and then — !"

"He may, or he may not," Raleigh said grimly. "Perhaps he will not care to acknowledge to his superiors that he let us pass in pursuit of their precious Grand Duke. It will be black as ink in half an hour. If we can only catch up with the train —"

Although he had not finished his sentence, like a rocket in a black sky, his idea burst upon the consciousness of his friends.

The train ahead of them was bound straight for the German frontier. If they could catch up with it and sneak along behind it unobserved, through town and country where the potency of a Grand Duke's rank was unquestioned, they might make, in a single night, the progress it would have taken them days, or weeks, to accomplish over the roads.

For a minute no one spoke. Billy fairly illumined the dusk with the glow of satisfaction which radiated from him. He had always known that Raleigh

would find a way out of every difficulty. Only bring on a big enough difficulty and he would find a big enough scheme to solve it.

The newspaper man shook his head pathetically as he turned to the Princess:—

"That fellow *has* a head."

He spoke as if he had just made the discovery and were pained.

It became darker and darker, until they could see absolutely nothing of the country they were passing through. Naturally they did not light their own lamps, and they strained their eyes for the rear lanterns of the train.

"We're taking just a risk or two," murmured Blythe. "A switch turned, after the train has passed, and it is good-bye—everything!"

A gentle breeze began to blow in their faces.

"The *Bird* is going faster than the wind," said Billy exultantly, "and that is blowing fiercer than ever. I tell you we are going *some!*"

In the night, and with the storm pursuing them, it was impossible to tell how fast they actually were going. Whenever there was a light near the track, it went past them like a shooting star.

At length they caught sight of the tail lights of the train, and never did a green lantern afford such satisfaction.

"Hurrah! now we're all right," shouted Raleigh. "We can creep up into the vacuum just behind the

train, and then it won't take more than half the petrol it now does to keep up with it."

"That's the way Mile-a-Minute Murphy managed it on his bicycle," assented Blythe. "I covered that for the *Times*. And the joke is on the Duke. He will never know he set the pace for us; for it is as black as the inside of a cow."

But in this surmise the tall man made a considerable mistake. They had hardly taken their place just back of the buffers, when by some mischance the rear door of the car opened, and a man in uniform flashed a lantern in their faces.

CHAPTER LVI

THE THING BEHIND

For one second the blinding light of the lantern was in their eyes. Then there was a crash, and a tinkle of glass and metal, as it fell. The man who had held it disappeared inside the car.

"Here 's a how de do; here 's a pretty mess," whistled Blythe softly. "Have to drop back now, Cap'n, I suppose, and hit the road again."

Raleigh shook his head obstinately. He hated, as hates a dreamer, to abandon a good scheme. He might have to do as Blythe said, but he would wait a while and see. Perhaps the man would think he had been the victim of an hallucination, and say nothing about it to any one.

Princess Tassa leaned over from the rear seat.

"You are still going to keep on behind the train?" she asked.

"For a time, yes."

"Would it not be safer to make masks out of our handkerchiefs, so that we could not be recognized?"

Blythe seconded the suggestion. "That 's an idea. You know what we are doing is n't exactly regular."

Tassa's deft fingers, with the help of Billy's pen-

IN THE WAKE OF THE GRAND DUKE'S TRAIN

knife, quickly fashioned four rude masks from their handkerchiefs.

Meanwhile a singular scene was being enacted inside the train.

The train-hand who had let the lantern fall not only did not think himself the victim of hallucination, but invested those he had seen with dread personality.

He rushed unceremoniously into the presence of the Personage, and tremblingly announced that a band of anarchists were close in pursuit of them.

The Grand Duke, the greatness of whose birth seemed to have robbed him of every vestige of other greatness, was a small man — small in size, small in courage, small in heart. He had already shown the metal he was of in the war with Japan, where he had been sent back from the front — without honor!

Blustering — yet with paling cheeks — he scouted the story of the train-hand. Such a thing was not possible. How could an engine come into the hands of anarchists? The man was crazy!

The underling stuck to his story. It was not an engine. It was a low creeping car, the like of which he had never seen on the track before.

The Grand Duke threw down the cards he had been playing with.

"Go and see!" he said to the three favorites at the gaming-table.

They rose, slowly and awkwardly as mechanical toys. There was none of the usual alacrity with

which those sycophants and flatterers obeyed the behests of him they fawned upon.

The rear door opened again — the merest crack — and three eyeballs, one above the other, glued themselves to the crack.

In the ghastly green light from the tail-lamps of the train the masked Terror they saw sent them reeling back with blanched faces and quaking hearts.

Their reports left no bluster about the Personage.

In his wildest dream it would not have occurred to him to verify those reports with his own eyes.

He accepted them with entire credulity, and magnified them tenfold with his craven imagination.

He thought his last hour had come, and called upon his favorite saint to busy himself in his behalf.

What horrible fate were these silent pursuers preparing for him? Why did nothing happen? As hour after hour passed the suspense was horrible. Once he became so frenzied that he was on the point of throwing himself from the train, and had to be forcibly restrained by members of his suite.

He cowered in the first of the two cars, until even that seemed too near to the avengers. Then he insisted on climbing over the tender to the engineer's cab on the locomotive, where he kept bribing the firemen to pile on more and more fuel. He lavished all the money he had on his person, and gave promises of more to come, should he escape with his life —

promises, it may be mentioned, which he afterwards easily forgot.

When he saw the fuel of the tender getting low, he was seized with a fresh panic, and ordered his suite to rip up the woodwork in the two cars behind and bring it forward to burn in the engine. The more they brought, the more he demanded, till there was hardly a splinter left, and the cars looked as if the tornado behind had passed through and devastated them.

CHAPTER LVII

AT THE BREAK OF DAY

THE anxiety with which those in the gyrocar awaited the next move of those in the train gradually lessened, as time passed and there was no move. The only change they noticed was an increase of speed in the train, until — in spite of the still air about them — they felt that they were rushing along at a truly marvelous rate.

"I wish we had a speedometer. I should just like to know how fast we *are* going," said Raleigh.

"You would n't have thought the old engine had so much up its sleeve, would you?" put in Billy.

"But why do you suppose they don't open that door again and continue our acquaintance?"

The unnaturalness of this worried the newspaper man.

"I guess they take us for Whitecaps," suggested Billy sagely; "and they have made up their minds to be good."

In the suction behind the train they found that the *Phœnix Bird* could keep its place without the slightest trouble on a relatively small consumption

of the precious petrol. And as the night wore on, this became a matter of considerable importance to them. Though the tanks on their car were large, she had never been designed for a twelve hours' run at such speed.

As hour after hour went by, this miraculous flying through the night became actually monotonous. There was, of course, no steering to do, and the motor required only slight attention.

At irregular intervals a cluster of lights would denote their passage through a town. These would flash upon them and be gone in a moment, and the universal blackness would again engulf them. Once an unusual number of lights indicated a city of large size. Its name they did not even try to guess.

After a time the swift motion acted as a powerful soporific, and Blythe and the Princess fell soundly asleep in their seats. Billy and Raleigh took turns in minding the engine and sleeping.

Toward the end of the night it was Raleigh's trick at the wheel. The first gleam of light had not appeared in the eastern sky, still there was a just perceptible lessening of the opaqueness of the night. Although he could make out nothing, it was no longer black chaos he was rushing through, he was again on the dark earth. The storm had passed off to the right, and yet in the vacuum behind the train he was still protected thoroughly from the rushing air, which closed in a few feet behind him.

There was a slight bump of the *Phœnix Bird* against the car ahead.

Raleigh woke up with a start.

He must have been dozing, for now there were faint streaks of light in the sky behind, and the passing landscape could quite distinctly be seen.

Odd that he should have run into the train, he thought. It would have been more natural if he had fallen behind. The train must be going slower.

It must be so; for again he had to close the throttle — and presently again, to prevent another collision.

They passed a road, crossing the track, and by this time they were going no more than fifteen miles an hour.

Raleigh called to the others.

Sodden with sleep, they roused themselves and stared at each other in their masks, not knowing but that they were in a nightmare.

"Where am I?" asked Blythe, "and who are you?"

"Wake up, and pull that thing off your head," answered Raleigh. "I don't know *where* we are, but our name will be Dennis, if we don't look out. The train is stopping. Maybe they are out of coal. We 'd better get away from here before *they* investigate and find out who we are."

He ran the *Phœnix Bird* back to the cross-road.

"Now we 'll lift her off, and put the tires on, and make tracks for parts unknown."

All were thoroughly awake by this time, and set to work with haste. They had only put one of the tires on, when Blythe cried warningly: —

"*What 's that?*"

They were petrified to see the train they had deserted bearing down upon them in the dim gray light.

For a second not one of the four even drew a breath. Then, to the consternation of his companions, Raleigh began to laugh hysterically.

"Has he gone crazy?" demanded Blythe.

"No, I have n't; but they have finally done what I was so afraid of their doing last night that I hardly dared think of it, lest the idea be carried telepathically to them. They just cut their last car loose, and ran away with the rest."

"But why is the car coming back to us?" asked the newspaper man.

"There must be an up grade here, and gravity is bringing it back."

"And the others will return with an armored train and a couple of Gatling guns presently," Billy suggested.

"That 's what we may expect, if we stay here long," assented his chum, "so we had better get away from here just as fast as we can."

When the second tire was in place, they followed

the cross-road to the south. They had no idea whither it led.

By seven o'clock they reached a small town where they were able to replenish their stores of petrol and oil.

They inquired the name of the town. The shopkeeper told them.

It conveyed to them no idea of their whereabouts. Even Blythe was entirely at fault, and they were afraid to ask too much.

"I thought I knew the route by heart for some distance ahead of us," the correspondent said, "but this beats me. All I can say is that we are a long way from where we started."

Tassa had some more talk with the shopkeeper, who knew all about the great race, and asked innumerable questions. Through what towns had they come? Where had they spent the night? How many versts had they covered the day before? And many more particulars, which she found it embarrassing to answer.

As the best way to avoid his questions, she questioned him. Then in utter amazement she turned to the Americans: —

"He says we are only thirty versts from the German border."

"Three hundred, you mean."

She spoke to the man again.

"No, he says *thirty*."

"If that is so," Raleigh said softly, as if not to awaken himself out of the beautiful dream, "if that is so, that big town was Warsaw — and we must be in the lead of the race again. And — and it scares me to think how many miles we traveled last night."

CHAPTER LVIII

AN EXTRA

THEY were all so startled by the news that they went on without asking which road to take.

A milkman was delivering his wares, and of him they inquired the way.

He looked at them with the greatest surprise.

"That road is the one which goes to Germany, of course," he replied loftily.

They cared not what his attitude toward them was so long as he gave them the information they desired. Without waiting to get anything to eat, they set off for the frontier. Indeed, with the end of Poland — the last bit of land under Russian dominion — so near, they could not stop to think of food.

It seemed incredible that Freedom should be only an hour away. They felt as if they must hasten on without an instant's delay, or some unforeseen obstacle would arise, and they would be too late.

Yet when the last moment came, it passed so unsensationally that they might only have been out for a morning's drive. There was no Chinese Wall between tyranny and freedom. No dragon sat there with slavering jaws. Some commonplace men in uni-

form, going about their business in an ordinary manner, gave an official examination to their papers, and wished them success in the race. The motor started up in just the same way it had started up a thousand times before. The wheels made a few revolutions — and it was all over.

The realization of a long-striven-for object seldom brings with it a joy as acute as the hope that has kept it alive. On the four in the car there came a kind of sadness when the tension under which they had been for so long was removed.

They had become such good friends, during the trials they had borne in common, that they could not bear the thought of parting from each other. Almost in silence they drove on till they reached Gnesen, the first German town beyond the frontier. This was not where they had expected to pass through, and Prince Anastasief was waiting for them at Thorn, some distance to the north.

They stopped at Gnesen for dinner, of which they were in sore need, in spite of something eaten in the car as they went along. The strain of the last twenty-four hours — the culmination of their long journey through the dominion of the Czar — had been greater than they had realized, and they were nearly worn out.

While at dinner a boy came running past the window of the Wirthshaus, shouting something at the top of his lungs.

Tassa called him to her, and bought a paper.

"It is an extra edition," she said, smiling, "and I think it will be of interest to you. Listen to this," and she translated the headlines: —

EXTRAORDINARY NIGHT ATTACK

GRAND DUKE'S TRAIN
FOLLOWED BY ANARCHISTS FOR
600 MILES

DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO
KILL HIM

GRAND DUKE BRAVELY
REPULSES THEM

CAVALRY NOW SCOURING
COUNTRY FOR MISCREANTS

The narrative accompanying the picture was quite as bloodcurdling as the headlines. After a circumstantial account of the fusillade poured upon the devoted train by the anarchists, "which wrought a devastation in the cars which must be seen to be believed — it was little less than a miracle that no one was mortally wounded," the article wound up with: —

"The Grand Duke kept these ruffians at bay with the most magnificent courage, during the whole long night. Only at daybreak, when their ammunition was exhausted, and the fuel for the engine nearly gone, did they cut loose the rear car, and themselves speed away. They had hoped to entice them along to some garrison town on the border, and there effect

their capture. Troops are now scouring the country for the miscreants, and there is little doubt that they will soon be taken.

"And look at these pictures," the Princess exclaimed, after she had translated the article to them. "They're said to be 'drawn from descriptions of eye-witnesses,' too."

Had the Americans not been sure that the article could refer to no one except themselves, it would never have occurred to them that the *Phœnix Bird* could present such an appearance, even to the most myopic of eye-witnesses. It had become a huge car, with a crew of ruffians aboard it sufficient in number to man a liner, and of such ferocity of demeanor that it fairly shone through the white caps that covered their hideous lineaments.

Blythe studied the picture a long time.

"I'm *sorry* for them," he said at length. "They *must* have been scared."

The sadness which all four felt at their approaching separation was lightened by the humor of this lurid account.

"And now, my dear companions," said the Princess with a certain timidity, "I have a favor to ask of you."

"Well, I guess you can consider it granted,—eh, Raleigh?" Blythe replied.

The young man's face, however, held a look of anxiety, and he did not speak.

Avoiding his eyes, the Princess addressed herself to the other two.

"It is this: I want you to win the race — I want it ever so much. My father is waiting for me at T . I can perfectly well go — "

ll, I guess *not*," Raleigh broke in impetuousl We will take you to him, and hand you over s ad sound."

Tass uted prettily.

"I ha ved so long under a despotism, I should love to feel e to travel where I wished. And I did want to have y own way in this. I — I — "

"Oh, but it is n't that; only — "

"I have done everything you told me to till now. I thought in America men did what girls wanted them to. And I do *so* want you to win this race. A few hours' delay may just make the difference."

"But your father — " Raleigh began lamely.

"My father has been living in America: he will understand when I tell him that I *made* you."

At this point Tassa obtained an ally in Blythe.

"It would n't have occurred to me not to take the Princess to Thorn ourselves," he said; "but there is a lot of sense in her idea. She can really travel there in perfect safety; and though it would n't take us long to go there, it might just make the difference between winning and losing."

Raleigh was moodily drumming on the table with his fingers, loath to yield.

Tassa leaned forward and spoke to him directly.

"You must admit the sense of Mr. Blythe's words."

"Oh, yes, they're *sensible* enough," he burst forth — and then stopped, blushing. He could not go on and say that a few more hours in company with Tassa meant more to him than winning the race.

"Please say I may go," she pleaded.

There seemed nothing for Raleigh to do except to assent.

"At least, take Merk with you. I shall feel that you are safer."

CHAPTER LIX

DAY AND NIGHT

They drove her to the station, where fortunately they found a train just about to start north. A liberal tip procured for her and Merk a compartment to themselves — somewhat against the strict regulations, it must be admitted; but there are few countries where regulations do not doff their caps to money.

Merk followed Tassa into the compartment, glancing back hopefully at his master. When it was made clear to him that they were to separate, he barked his protest. He could not see why they should not always keep on together. But as if he understood that he was intrusted with the safety of the girl, he did not try to jump out of the compartment. He took his seat with doggish dignity at her side, and from there barked good-bye to his old friends.

The three Americans stood bareheaded, as the train went off, till long after they lost sight of the dark, sensitive face of her who had become so endeared to them.

Blythe turned away at length with a sigh.

"I never took much stock in princesses and such before; but if the rest are like that little trump of a girl, all I can say is, 'Hurrah for princesses!'"

Raleigh swallowed hard once or twice.

"I'm glad she's got Merk with her," was all he said.

Billy put his arm through his chum's sympathetically, without uttering a word.

In silence they walked out of the station, back to the strangely lonely-looking *Phœnix Bird*. Blythe glanced at Raleigh, and, suddenly assuming an air of great briskness, said: —

"And now we might as well hit the trail for Paris. We have still the race to win, you know."

Billy cranked the machine, and they started. They were now on the famous roads of Germany — roads which would be perfect the rest of the way to Paris. The *Phœnix Bird* sped along, its motor working as smoothly as if it had just left the shop in Punchard, instead of having covered three quarters of the globe, and come over some of the roughest going which could be traversed by wheels.

The delightful smoothness of the roads and the return to civilization would have been most welcome to the Americans had they not known that these same good roads would help their high-powered rivals far more.

During the course of the day they learned that the *Liebig* was only seventy-five miles behind them,

with the *Briquette* and the *Ischia* neck and neck fifty miles farther away.

They soon came to realize that this close finish was rousing the greatest excitement in Germany, where it was hoped that the preëminence of France in the manufacture of motors was on the eve of being wrested from her by the *Liebig's* victory.

At this stage of the race the possibilities of the *Phœnix Bird* were not seriously considered, when there were real roads instead of trackless wastes to traverse; and this was an opinion in which our young inventors could not but concur.

"Barring accidents, they will overhaul us hand over hand," admitted Raleigh sadly to his companions; "and with ordinary care there need be no accidents now."

"That's very true," Billy admitted cheerfully. "But, on the other hand, with ordinary *carelessness* there is always likely to be some accident."

The correspondent brooded over the situation for a long time without saying a word. Billy turned to him hopefully.

"What do you think about it?" he asked.

"'But I was thinking of a plan
To dye my whiskers green,
And then to use so large a fan
That they could not be seen.'" —

he quoted enigmatically.

"Did you write that?" Billy asked respectfully.

"No, my son; I wish I had. That is from *Alice*, — I am sorry to see you do not know your Alice, — but we must not let ourselves stray away into the realm of poesy at this juncture. What I was thinking was this: You two can't drive this car night and day without any rest, can you?"

"No; I wish we could," answered Raleigh ruefully.

"I suppose the *Phœnix Bird* could stand it?"

"Yes, I believe the good little thing would go on from here to Paris without stopping."

"Here is the idea which has been germinating in my brain. Of course, I don't pretend to know anything about machinery in general, but I have learned to run the car a bit, have n't I?"

"You do very well," answered Raleigh.

"Suppose, then, that we divide the time in two-hour shifts, and each take his trick at the wheel, turn and turn about? That will give each of us four hours off out of six. We 'll arrange the rear seat as a kind of bed, and as soon as one of us leaves the wheel, he will be entitled to two hours' sleep. In that way we can keep going night and day — and only stop for gasolene and supplies. I 'll engage to prepare the meals in part of my time off; and if you could fix me up a box to hold a little alcohol lamp I 'd show you what a chef I really am."

"I say, that 's good of you, Blythe," Raleigh exclaimed, "for we need every minute if we 're not to be hopelessly distanced."

CHAPTER LX

LOSING THE LEAD

It was a ceaseless grind, in some ways harder than anything they had yet been through. They had expected it to be easier on good roads, but they found, curiously enough, that they missed the variety which bad roads afforded. There was a monotony about this present fair method of progressing which wearied the brain. The bad roads had, at least, given to their minds and to their muscles some change, whenever they had come to a spot which appeared impassable and with which they had to wrestle.

There were no stops and consultations now. It was always the same: forever going forward, eyes glued on the road ahead, mile after mile reeling past, till it seemed as if life were nothing except one eternal trundling forward over the smooth surface of the earth.

They came to Schwerin in the dead of night. This being one of the places where they expected to renew their tires, they had telegraphed ahead, and Prince Anastasief's agent was awaiting them.

There, while Billy and the agent busied themselves in putting on the tires, Raleigh and Blythe

rigged up a soap-box with alcohol lamp for culinary purposes. The last time they had changed tires had been in Siberia, and while these were still in fair condition, owing to their long run on the rail, they could hardly be relied on to make the entire trip to Paris, and they wanted no breakdown, even if it meant a little delay now.

They were all pretty well worn out, and the events of the last thirty-six hours had told severely on them. Yet, to the amazement of the host at the inn where they had stopped, they set off again, instead of seeking some hours of rest in bed. From the innkeeper they had secured another large cushion, and with this the rear seat seemed a veritable bed of ease to their tired bodies, when to each one came his allotted two short hours of sleep.

Over the perfect German roads they bowled along as fast as Raleigh considered safe for the motor of the gyrocar, in view of the tremendous task that was asked of it.

The hours wore on, — those hours which can fly so fast, or crawl so slowly, — and they seemed all alike to the three weary ones in the car, though sometimes the moon shone, and sometimes the sun, and sometimes the only light on their way came from their own lamps.

Gradually, however, they adapted themselves to their circumstances, as man has the power of doing more than any other animal. They learned to rest in

their two hours of sleep on the rear seat, and to awaken ready to take their turn at the wheel.

And the little car kept on going.

"It's all due to my cooking, I believe," said Blythe. "I have a great mind to start a sanitarium when I get back. There would be more money in it than in poetry."

On the way to Berlin, the *Liebig* came snorting up alongside them.

At the sight of the little car, Lauterwörter stood up in his seat, open-mouthed with amazement and incredulity mingled with admiration.

"Donnerwetter!" he cried. "Does your machine haf vings concealed underneat, like a beetle, und shpread 'em out in der night und fly? How haf you manage to shlip by us?"

"We only emulate the busy bee, and improve each shining hour," Blythe answered.

"But did you not haf many trubbles in Russia before you got into Shermany?" Wildejagd put in.

"No, I believe we made about our best time along there," Raleigh answered, his eyes twinkling.

"I nefer see such vellers! You say you haf twelf horse-bower. Maybe ofer der good roads you haf; but I tink you haf 'bout hundert mule-bower for shkippin' along ofer der bad roads, like a waterbug," said Lauterwörter.

"Good-bye, now!" Wildejagd laughed jovially,

as a man does who is confident in his powers. "You vill not shlip py us again. No more waterbug shkipping here. So long! Ve haf big banquet in Berlin to-night. Ve must hurry ahead."

With doleful countenances the Americans saw the *Liebig* draw away. No banquets for them! Nothing but endless plodding along at the best speed they were capable of.

"It's an uphill game," murmured Blythe. "I feel something the way I did when we started out of New York, and they ran away from us as if we had been tied to a lamp-post."

"There were twelve ahead of us then," suggested Billy. "Now there is only one."

Almost unnoticed the *Phœnix Bird* passed through Berlin. They could have had a banquet themselves, had they been so minded. And newspaper men and motorists and sightseers would have clustered around them. But they arrived in town at eleven o'clock, and kept right on through.

Outside of one hall, which was especially gay with lights and music and every sign of festivity, they saw the *Liebig* standing, huge and weather-beaten, guarded by policemen and surrounded by a crowd of admiring spectators. It was taking its hours of ease, while the *Phœnix Bird* plodded along.

In spite of this, by the middle of the next day, the *Liebig* passed them again; and seven hours

later the *Briquette* swept by them at forty miles an hour, hot on the trail of the leader.

Yet neither of these kept at their task the whole twenty-four hours as did the brave little gyrocar.

CHAPTER LXI

TOO MUCH ENTHUSIASM

ALTHOUGH the public was permitted to see and to admire the *Liebig* and the *Briquette*, and to waste their drivers' brief hours of rest in banquets and addresses of welcome, it began to take an unaccountable interest in the mysterious little car of the young Americans, which slipped through the eager cities with never a stop.

The newspapers, of course, soon saw how the ever-onward flitting of the *Phœnix Bird* appealed to the imagination of the public, and were at pains to cater to it. Cars filled with reporters cruised along it from every town, shouting out questions and noting answers.

Blythe was too good a newspaper man himself not to satisfy them fully, though certain of the most interesting details, for obvious reasons, he did not think best to divulge.

Above all, what captivated the world was the incontrovertible fact that this little car, the invention and the work of two young men, had thus far held its own, in this terrible journey, with the products of the most famous factories of Europe and America.

Telegrams began to be shot at Raleigh, addressed to every town where he might be caught, and delivered by motor-cyclists. These were from manufacturers of Germany, France, Italy, and America, imploring him to pledge himself to no one else until he had seen their representatives.

Perhaps the most satisfactory of all these flying messages which chased him along, was the following: —

Congratulations. I missed a big chance.
Mortimer Z. Kidder.

The farther they proceeded, the greater evidences of popular interest did they encounter. Swarms of other motors played about them, — gayly painted cars, spick and span, — yet insignificant butterflies compared to them.

Little bands of schoolgirls, in white dresses and pink and blue sashes, stood with baskets of roses, and strewed them in their path. The Americans waved their hands and shouted their thanks, but never stopped.

Onward they plodded, one of them always asleep in the rear, Blythe at intervals cooking meals for them in his box. Two swift cars were ahead of them. There did not appear to be a possible chance of overtaking them with their own slower car; yet never for an instant did they slacken their efforts, though the race seemed hopelessly lost.

At Coblenz, the last of the big German towns, a great banquet was given the *Liebig's* crew. They ate and they drank without self-restraint; for the race was assuredly theirs. They stood up and declared that they would cross France with a burst of speed which would prove Germany first and the rest nowhere.

They were cheered and toasted to make the roof come off; and from the banqueting-hall they dashed away into the night like a whirlwind.

Their heads were hot from the wine they had drunk and the flattery they had listened to. Gone was their fatigue. Wide they opened the throttle, and tremendous the speed that resulted. They grazed corners, escaped lamp-posts by inches, and swerved from side to side of the road. They felt like demigods to whom no harm could come.

For some hours, with marvelous luck, they escaped every danger. Then it began to drizzle, and at a turn they skidded ignominiously into the ditch.

Early in the morning the *Phœnix Bird* came upon them there. A rumble of polysyllabic guttural German thickened the air about them, strong, but not strong enough to lift the car and straighten its axle. That would require hours of hard work, when hours were composed of golden moments of opportunity.

More carefully than ever did the young Amer-

icans drive after this, taking no chances of damaging either themselves or other users of the highway.

Most of the drivers in the race considered that they had a sort of divine right to the whole of the road — an assumption which led them first and last into no little trouble.

Halfway between Luxembourg and Rheims they overtook the *Briquette* in an angry altercation with a peasant into whose cart they had run, and whose ox they had killed.

Fired by passing the dreaded *Liebig*, the *Briquette* was running down a hill at a tremendous rate of speed, and had not the dull-pated peasant conceived the road to be as much designed for his use as for that of automobiles, it would have gained such a distance on the German car, before it could be mended, as to be beyond competition. As it was, the French crew came very near being haled before the local magistrate. Only by appealing to the peasant's patriotism, and by paying liberally for his ox, were they enabled to proceed on their way.

Then they discovered that the ox-cart itself had been entirely devoid of patriotism, and had smashed their left front wheel so badly that they could barely limp along to the next town at a snail's pace. Luckily they were not far from their factory, and could get a new wheel in a few hours.

The little *Phœnix Bird* was again in the lead,

crawling along toward its goal — its very respectable pace seemed to its drivers only a crawl — with the knowledge that two powerful monsters would soon again be in pursuit of it.

CHAPTER LXII

PARIS ON TIPTOE

PARIS — while the three motor-cars were struggling desperately onward — was becoming so excited over the contest that it lost interest in all other events.

On the night before the cars were expected to arrive, bulletins of the race were sent to all the clubs, hotels, and restaurants. The theatres interrupted their performances to read aloud the latest reports.

Amid a solemn hush, and followed by deep groaning, a telegram was read: —

Liebig repaired traveling fast expects overhaul Phœnix Bird morning.

The metropolis was cheered, however, toward the end of the fourth act, by the following message: —

Briquette on road again tearing across France ventre à terre expects pass Phœnix Bird.

A crowd clustered about the bulletin boards in front of the newspaper offices all night long, cheering when the French car was reported doing well, and groaning savagely when the German seemed to be gaining.

At daybreak the city was already up. From the *Matin* office for miles out into the country the roads

were lined with people on the *qui vive* for the first sight of the winning racer. All the other parts of Paris were deserted.

If the nation had been waiting to learn its fate in a great battle, the excitement could hardly have been more intense.

Most of them hoped that the French car would win from the hulking German; but there was a large number who hoped that the plucky little Yankee car would come in first.

The route to be followed by the racers made a détour around the city in order to enter by the Champs Elysées.

It was fortunate that this wide street with its big open spaces had been chosen. Otherwise hundreds would have been badly crushed.

At length those lucky enough to have obtained a place on the Arc de Triomphe espied through their binoculars far out on the horizon a little black speck.

Nearer and nearer it sped, in a marvelous sprint as it approached its goal.

A cry arose, sweeping over the spectators like fire along a line of gunpowder.

"*The Briquette! The Briquette!*"

An instant later the report was contradicted, and the oncoming car was declared to be the *Liebig*.

Along the Avenue de Neuilly it flew; up the Avenue de la Grande Armée it panted; around the

Arc de Triomphe it swept; and down the Champs Elysées it tore.

The Place de la Concorde was a sea of faces, and a storm of cheers and a spray of up-thrown hats passed over it as the car clove its way through it, like the Israelites through the Red Sea.

Only then, from the Eiffel Tower, did there float out the majestic folds of Old Glory.

The brave little gyrocar reached the office of *Le Matin* half an hour in front of the *Briquette*, and a bare hour before the *Liebig*.

The populace went mad over the victory of "Ces braves Américains," and in their enthusiasm the French forgave it for beating their own champion.

It was lucky that its equilibrium was entirely stable; for it was almost swept from the ground by the surging mob.

At the *Matin* office, the crowd filled the street solidly from curb to curb. The aristocrats were cheering from windows, from coaches, and from automobiles, stalled in the quicksands of humanity.

A veteran adherent of the former emperors of France exclaimed: "If only a Bonaparte had made the trip in *ce drôle de geero-car*, he would be emperor in twenty-four hours."

From one of the high coaches came a sharp bark, which sounded natural. Looking up, the Americans saw Merk, frantically struggling to leap down on the heads below and come to his master. A slender, pretty

girl had her arms around him and was holding him back.

It was Tassa, and there was that shining in her eyes, as they met those of Raleigh Kilbreth, which meant more to him than the winning of the race and the acclamation of the populace.

Beside her stood Prince Anastasief and Raleigh's father and mother, waving and shouting.

"I just wish some of those editors who refuse my poetry could see me now," said Blythe proudly.

But who was this heavy-shouldered man, in plain clothes and with roughened hands, who sprang down from the coach and ploughed his way through the mass of humanity like a sturgeon through minnows?

"Why, father!" cried Billy, thinking he surely could not be seeing aright. "You here?"

"Yes, son," answered Hawpe.

His face had lost its bloated look, and his eyes were clear.

"I am here. I had an idea that contraption you boys made would n't be far behind at the end. And, Billy," he added in an undertone, "I want to tell you that there are real trees growing around our house now, and flowers in the garden — just the way your mother always wanted. And you did it, Billy! You did it!"

THE END

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